



*COMMITTED*

*to World Mission*

*A Focus on International Strategy*

*edited by VICTOR ADRIAN and DONALD LOEWEN*



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Edited by

Victor Adrian  
and  
Donald Loewen

Winnipeg MB, Canada



Hillsboro, KS, USA

## **COMMITTED TO WORLD MISSION**

A focus on International Strategy

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## FOREWORD

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In his first letter, Peter startles us with the comment, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10a,RSV). The concept that strikes us as strange is Peter's contention that once his listeners were not a people. We would say, "But each Gentile believer enjoyed a culture." Some spoke Greek, some Persian, some Latin: they represented authentic, living cultures. But Peter saw that kind of "peoplehood" as inadequate. The grace of Jesus Christ had something far greater in store.

Because of the transformation in their hearts they desired fellowship with other believers. They entered into a new "peoplehood." This did not mean that they cut themselves off from their cultures. It did mean a new loyalty and family relationship which fulfilled Christ's promise that there would be one body because there is one Head. This was suddenly a new family on the earth - a family whose existence was also in heaven.

Every Christian must participate in his/her cultural milieu while also enjoying active citizenship in the New Kingdom which supercedes all societal and natural boundaries. This is the call of God.

What does this have to do with Curitiba? A great deal. While in some way denominationalism is to be regretted, it can be utilized redemptively in building the body of Christ. When I heard that the Mennonite Brethren worldwide brotherhood was meeting in Curitiba, my heart rejoiced because I saw this as a concrete, visible expression of the universal family of God which is the "new peoplehood." This meeting of one part of the Body, the Mennonite Brethren, is not the whole family of God. Nor did this meeting cut them off from the greater fellowship. They were simply taking seriously the international scope of the church.

This book contains the results of their deliberations, which are important. But as I see it, the glory of the consultation was that in Christ the Mennonite Brethren felt compelled by the love of Christ to sit down, talk

with one another, pray together, and share life openly together. They wanted to worship the Lord together and reaffirm their loyalty not only to the Lord but also to one another in the international family of Christ.

This represents a new wave. The disparity between older churches and younger churches is being addressed. For that the Curitiba meeting must be applauded. Our work will never be absolutely complete until all are brought together into unity; nevertheless, we work constantly at maintaining a peaceful unity of the Spirit in the entire Church.

*Donald R. Jacobs*

*Donald R. Jacobs is executive director of the Mennonite Christian Leadership Foundation in Landisville, Pennsylvania.*

## INTRODUCTION

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During the last decade the hope for a denominational conference that would bring together delegates from all over the world grew within the Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services Board and among some of the national leaders. The challenge of ministering to a needy world called for a closer international partnership. Church growth in Third World countries and the shift of Christianity from the North to the South and the East meant that creative international partnerships among Mennonite Brethren churches needed to be explored. At the urging of twenty international delegates at the North American Conference in Reedley, California in 1984, the first Mennonite Brethren World Mission Conference in Curitiba, Brazil was born. An International Executive and Program Committee was appointed to make plans and arrangements for the conference [Victor Adrian (chairman), Kilabi Bululu (Africa) Takao Nakamura (Japan), Jacob August Wall (Brazil), P.B. Arnold (Asia), Franz Rathmair (Austria), Herbert Brandt and H.H. Dick (North America)].

When the first worldwide conference of the Mennonite Brethren met February 17-21, 1988 in Curitiba, Brazil some 805 registered delegates representing fifteen countries and about 160,000 Mennonite Brethren Church members focused on the theme "The Mennonite Brethren Mission in the World." The conference, held in the Boqueirão Mennonite Brethren Church, was conducted in four and sometimes five languages, and its plenary sessions drew thirteen to fourteen hundred people daily.

The conference demonstrated a literal fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah: "So is my word that goes out of my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent

it" (55:11). Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has inwardly impelled followers of Christ boldly to bear witness to him in all the world. As the Mennonite Brethren Church emerged from a spiritual movement in the Ukraine in the mid-nineteenth century, it was fired by the same Spirit. Fed by the evangelical fervor of Pietism and by Anabaptist theology, the founding members sought to recover New Testament Christianity. Eventually the movement sent missionaries to evangelize, to serve and to plant churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

Curitiba 88, or Awakening 88 as the Brazilians called it, had a three-fold purpose: to enable us to encourage each other in faith and life; to permit our understanding of our mission in the contemporary world to grow in such a way as to foster a common vision and strategy; and to forge a closer partnership in the mission of the church.

The conference accomplished four things, according to the International Planning Committee: (1) it focused on the centrality of the mission of the church in the world; (2) it expressed the dominant perspective that the hope of the world lies in sharing Christ with the nations. Before we can expect a better world, we need transformed men and women who are the light and salt of the earth. Evangelism and church planting, therefore, need to remain at the heart of the church's task and ministry in the world; (3) it fostered closer family denominational relationships—an encouragement for every national church; and (4) it made significant steps toward a growing partnership among the national Mennonite Brethren churches. In smaller sessions throughout the conference delegates met with representatives of Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services.

Today we use the word "internationalization" to express the growing relationships in international church partnerships. This concept reflects the profound biblical truth that the Spirit of God, poured out upon all flesh, gives spiritual gifts to all people for ministry to the whole body of Christ. It also recognizes that wherever the gospel takes root there follows the universal call of Christ to "disciple all the nations." The internationalization of Mennonite Brethren mission means acknowledging the work of the Spirit of God in the world and allowing for the free flow of ministries, insights, people, and financial resources, so that growing partnerships of equality and mutuality

are formed.

A growing partnership would mean moving from a partnership between Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services and Mennonite Brethren Churches within a given country to international cooperation. It would mean developing international missionary teams. In addition, it would mean planning and carrying out our mission efforts together. At Curitiba 88 the idea of developing regional committees (e.g. for Asia or Latin America) to plan for expansion of our mission work in a particular region of the world received warm endorsement. May steps toward stronger internationalization speed the evangelization of the world and hasten the coming of Christ!

What a great day to be alive! Christ is fulfilling his promise: "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Today the church is realizing the wonderful hope of its missionary efforts: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come" (Matt. 24:14).

We in the Western and Northern world need to be mindful that the frontiers of mission exist on all six continents. Not only has the Western world become more secularized, but it has also become religiously pluralistic. Immigration and the development of a closer world community, have created multi-cultural communities and brought hundreds of thousands of international students to our cities. Christianity exists side-by-side with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other faiths. The challenge to live for Christ and proclaim him as the way, the truth and the life—the only way to the Father—is before us.

We need to be filled with the compassion of Christ for the crowds. We need to sharpen our evangelistic skills, to communicate Christ as the light of the world and the life of all people. As we face a world with a growing population, as we observe rapidly expanding cities, as we experience a world of violence, injustice and poverty, we need to double our efforts to share the healing power of Christ and his righteousness.

I wish to express personal thanks to the international colleagues serving with me on the Executive and Program Committee. A special thanks to the local hosting committee in Curitiba under Jacob August Wall's leadership, to Robert Lay, who contributed much through music ministry, to the

many other helpers, and to Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services, which nurtured the idea of a world Mennonite Brethren conference until it came to fruition in 1988. May this record of presentations, discussions, and activities contribute to a larger vision of Christ's mission in the world.

*Victor Adrian*

*Chairman, Curitiba 88*



# Clarifying Our Mission

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Hans Kasdorf (U.S.)

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Curitiba 88 is a moving experience for me. It is in a land which has welcomed refugees with compassion; it is in the land where I learned to struggle for survival. Here I was converted to Christ, baptized, and nurtured.

We gather as brothers and sisters of the Mennonite Brethren Church, united from different countries of the Third, the Second, and the First World. Our purpose is to pray together, to listen to God together, and to discern together our common mission in the world.

## *1. The Biblical Anchor of our Mission*

The Bible is a missionary book from beginning to end. In its pages, God reveals both his creative work and his redemptive intent for the whole of humankind. Whenever we seek to understand our mission, we must do so in biblical terms. The Bible offers to us the unshakable foundation of mission; it describes three cornerstones in which our mission is firmly anchored. These are cornerstones which shall never be moved. The first is God himself; the second is Jesus Christ; the third is the Holy Spirit.

- Mission is Anchored in God, the Creator of the World

It is actually incorrect to speak of our mission, for we have none. Mission is God's, not ours. He first thought of mission, not we. God first engaged in mission, not we. The whole work of mission has to do with the redemption of a fallen world. And being fallen creatures, we cannot redeem ourselves. Only God can redeem us.

The Bible speaks of God in different terms. He is called *EL-ELYON*: Most High, Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:18-22; Acts 16:17; Heb. 7:1). He is called *EL-SHADDAI*, God Almighty, the omnipotent one who can

do all things and for whom nothing is impossible (Gen. 17:1-9; 28:3; Ex. 6:3; Isa. 40:25-26). He is called *EL-OLAM*, God of the future, the one who will always be there even when all else fails (Gen. 21:33; Isa. 40:28). He is called *YAHWEH*, the Great I AM, the God who transcends time and history, the omnipresent one who will be there to the end of our days (Exod 3:14-16; Matt. 28:20). He is called *EL-SABAOTH*, the LORD of hosts and King of kings; he is the Sovereign Ruler over all armies, powers, and dominions in heaven and on earth (cf. Exod. 15:1-18; Jer. 25:15-22; Eph. 1:18-21).

Such is the God of mission. He is a missionary God. He always stands in direct relationship to the world. His chief concern is salvation for the world. He always acts on behalf of the world. He wants to redeem fallen men and women—created in his image—whom he infinitely loves (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; John 3:16-17).

When we seek to clarify our mission, we must begin by seeing God's infinite greatness, his incomparable glory, and his immeasurable grace. We must understand that mission is really his, not ours. And yet in his sovereignty he has chosen to use us as instruments in mission. My friend and teacher David Bosch of South Africa correctly says, "God is a missionary God who crosses frontiers towards the world. In creation God was already the God of mission, with his Word and Spirit as 'Missionaries'" (cf. Gen. 1:2,3). Thus, God the Father is not alone in mission. He stands in a holy community with Jesus, his Son and our Lord, and he stands in community with the Holy Spirit, his missionary agent.

- Mission is Anchored in Jesus, the Savior and Lord

The Bible gives us the historical record of the God who sent his Son to save the world. We read in Gal. 4:4-5: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

The concepts of sending and sentness are central to all biblical mission language. Jesus the Savior was sent by God the Creator to set creation free, to liberate from sin, to save the world. God is the sender, Jesus the sent one. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says forty-six times that God has sent him. Jesus was sent to make known the love of God, a truth repeated many times by John. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (3:16

NIV). "God sent the Son into the world . . . that the world might be saved through him" (3:17 RSV). Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (1:29). The Son of God came as the bread of life, bringing true life to the world (6:33). The Son of God came as the light of the world, showing the way out of darkness to God (8:12).

The story of Zacchaeus and the sycamore tree is a fascinating one (Luke 19: 1-10). When Jesus came to town, Zacchaeus climbed the tree so that he could see the Lord. The point of the story is not Zacchaeus' small stature and strange actions, but Jesus' words to him: "Today salvation has come to this house . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:9-10 RSV).

Jesus became a model missionary. The writer to the Hebrew Christians says that Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17 NIV). Jesus was the incarnate model of missionary life for all times. The best missionaries are those who identify with the human situation, as Jesus did. They are able to interpret and implement the gospel within the context of cultural, social, economic, or political realities. They know they are ambassadors for Christ, asking men and women on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God (cf. Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 2 Cor. 5:11-21).

Jesus is also Lord over humankind, the Lord of the kingdom of God. Jesus ushered in a new era: the era of the kingdom of God. It was not the fullness or completion of the kingdom; it was the initiation. The completion will take place when Jesus returns. The kingdom is present where people have been reconciled to God through the forgiveness of sin; where people are concerned with justice, peace, and reconciliation in wholistic mission to the world; and where people allow Jesus to control their attitudes and relationships, their words and their actions.

Kingdom and church, however, are not the same. The church in mission is the servant of the kingdom; it is a sign of the kingdom. The church calls men and women into the kingdom by calling them to repentance and forgiveness, to justice and peace. That is its missionary message under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus said to his

disciples, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (Matt. 24:14).

But how shall this gospel be preached? How can we do it? We can do it because of the power of the Holy Spirit. John said, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). That greater one is the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world of sin and empowers the church for mission.

- Mission is Anchored in the Holy Spirit, the Gift and Power of God

Even before Jesus died on the cross, he promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit as counselor and teacher to be with them forever (cf. John 16:5-15; 15:26-27; 14:16-18). After Jesus had been raised from the dead and was about to ascend into heaven, he again gathered his followers around him and said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father has promised, which you have heard me speak about....You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8 NIV).

The disciples did not understand the meaning of these words until the day of Pentecost when they understood the Scriptures about the Holy Spirit. In his first missionary sermon, Peter quoted from the prophet Joel, saying, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:17-18, 21 NIV; cf. Joel 2:28-29, 32).

We cannot read this text without seeing God's larger plan for the church in world mission. The Holy Spirit is the great enabler for the church in mission. He empowers and equips God's people to take on a task far beyond their imagination and a work much greater than their ability. He provides them with a power that is far greater than their courage. And his agenda is much more inclusive than we often realize. It transcends—as the prophet Joel saw it—ethnic and racial boundaries; it bridges generational gaps and age distinctions; it makes no male/female discrimination; it

validates vision dreams under the Spirit's control.

Beyond that, the Spirit reveals God's greatness and glory, his sovereignty and power in space and time. His overarching concern is to enable God's people for mission. He helps them see the centrality of salvation, and equips them to help men and women everywhere and at any time to "call on the name of the Lord and be saved" (Acts 2:21).

The Holy Spirit calls us as ordinary men and women from many nations into world mission. He sends us from the secure haven of the church into the dangers of the world. He gives us special gifts for ministry in mission, empowers our testimony in mission, and accompanies us on our mission journey, and encourages and comforts us in times of defeat and hardship. He is with us to the end. But he never operates on his own initiative and never for his own glory. He gives to us what he receives from the Lord and he honors the Lord by what he does through us (cf. John 16:1-15).

Our mission is anchored in the Holy Spirit whose power is greater than all powers and principalities of all the worlds combined. Let us use his power to God's glory!

## ***2. The Ecclesiastical Character of our Mission***

What I am talking about here is the churchly nature of mission and the missionary nature of the church. I am not dealing here with a mission society or with a parallel structure of any kind; I am talking about the church. My focus is on the redeemed people of God who stand together in a responsible covenant relationship to each other and to the Lord. The church has a mission to the unredeemed—but redeemable—world. Let me clarify that by making four observations.

### **• Mission and Church Belong Together**

The church is essential for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abram in Gen. 12: "You shall be a blessing . . . . And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." As the people of Israel were to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" among the peoples of the world (Exod. 19:6), so the people of the church are to be missionaries among the peoples of the world. Church and mission are inseparable in God's redemptive plan. God created for himself a people for mission. The New Testament church is that

people. The apostle Peter put it this way: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10 NIV).

Mission is never a choice for the church; it is a matter of obedience to God. The late Georg Vicedom once said that it is not up to the church "to decide whether she will carry on the mission or not. She can only decide for herself whether she wants to be the church." He was right. If we want to be the church, we must be the church in world mission.

- Mission is a Two-Sided Sword of the Church

One side of this sword is the missionary dimension; the other is the missionary intention. One is the nature of the church; the other is the action of the church. The church is missionary in character. That is its being, its very nature. But not everything the church does is mission. When the church gathers for fellowship and worship or engages in care-giving to its own believers—that is not mission. Those are simply expressions of its missionary nature. The church is *missionary* in what it is as God's redeemed people; the church is *missionizing* in what it does as God's obedient people.

Therefore, the church must be on the cutting edge of the world. It must intentionally decide to missionize. Mission rarely happens within the safe confines of a church building. Mission happens in the world that is separated from God by sin, an unbelieving, unreconciled and unredeemed world. As Jesus was sent to missionize in the world, so he sends the church for the same purpose into the same world (cf. John 17:18; 20:23).

- Mission Always is from the Church to the World

God has called the church out of the world only to send it back into the world. In the missionary context world means people—men and women of all ages, races, nations, social classes, and ideological persuasions. The term "world" means people who are either not yet Christian or people who are no longer Christian. The world is full of both.

Many Christians used to think that mission had to be in Africa or Asia or on the islands of the sea—someplace far away. Many people used to

think that mission was from one continent to another or from one country to another. And that is partly justified. But geographical distance is not the main criterion to authenticate mission. Authentic mission is from the church to the world, wherever the world may be. The missionary statesperson Robert Glover once said that Christian mission is best defined as the proclamation of the gospel to the unconverted everywhere according to the command of Christ. The significance of that statement lies in its emphasis of mission from believers to unbelievers, from the church to the world. The Mennonite Brethren Church which gathers here is one church made up from different people groups speaking different languages. It gathers as one church, under one Lord, with one mission to one world. In preparing for this gathering, the brothers and sisters in Brazil had a unique vision. They eloquently call the worldwide Mennonite Brethren church to awaken to the challenge and opportunity of the church's mission to the world.

- Mission is Wider than the Church

A mere missionary church can sometimes be narrow, exclusive and provincial; it can be introverted, self-centered and ethnocentric; it can be comfortable and refuse to be disturbed by mission. But the church in world mission cannot behave that way. Mission pushes the church out and pulls it into the world. Mission opens the eyes of the church for the world. Mission stretches the church's vision from a local outlook to a global vision. Mission is never a question of convenience; it is always a question of obedience.

Yes, mission is wider than the institutional church and all its institutions; mission is as wide as the kingdom of God, embracing the lost, the oppressed, the oppressors, the poor, and the rich.

People in mission are kingdom people, ruled by Jesus the King. David Bosch expresses the distinction most sharply when he says, "Kingdom people seek first the kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; kingdom people work to see the church change the world." Church people who have a vision for world mission see themselves as God's servants to missionize the world.

### ***3. Practical Expressions of our Mission***

Mission demands determination and hard work. Here are a few practical ways in which we can express our mission to the world.

- **Mission is Expressed by Sending People into the World**

No church can be a missionizing church unless it is a sending church. Sending is the very essence of mission. With the help of a concordance and a Bible dictionary, I discovered some interesting biblical facts about sending.

First, the Hebrew Old Testament uses the word "sending" (*shalach*) in its verb form 850 times; 450 times it is used specifically to describe the sending of a messenger with a message (cf. Gen. 24:7, 40; 32:3; Exod. 3:1-15). Many times that message has religious significance.

Second, the whole idea of sending is important as an expression of mission throughout the Bible. The prophet Malachi closes the Old Testament with the promise that God will send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah (3:1; cf. 4:5). The New Testament makes the bold announcement that John the Baptist is that messenger, "a man sent from God"; he is the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah (Mark 1:2-8; Matt. 11:10-15; Luke 7:18-28; John 1:6-8).

Third, the New Testament uses the word "sending" in various forms (e.g. *apostello*; *apostolos*; *pempo*) more than three hundred times to express mission. The Gospel of John records in nearly fifty places that God is the one who sends and that Jesus is the one who is sent. The heartbeat of the Gospel of John is sentness to the world. In his high priestly prayer Jesus says six times that God has sent him into the world (John 17:3,8,18,21,23,25). And twice he says that just as God sent him into the world, so he sends his disciples into the world (17:18; cf. 20:21). The Apostle Paul also expresses mission in terms of sentness. He says repeatedly that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, which means that he is a sent one, an ambassador, a missionary of Jesus to the world (cf. Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1).

Fourth, each act of sentness involves at least four parts: a sender who has authority to send; a sent one who is obedient to the sender and goes,



a message that the sender wants to transmit through the sent one, and the recipient of that message.

The church must be a sending church if it wants to be a missionizing church. The church has been sent into the world and must keep on sending its own sons and daughters until Christ returns and the time of sentness is over. A non-sending church misses out on one of the most authentic expressions of mission; it has lost its missionary intention and stands in danger of losing its missionary dimension.

- Mission is Expressed by Crossing Frontiers Towards the World

Frontiers are boundaries or barriers. Traditionally, geographical distance was considered the primary frontier. But physical distance is only one of many frontiers and is the easiest one to cross. As a missionary of the church, I have traveled thousands of kilometers by ship and by plane, by bus and by train. That has always been relatively easy and, as a whole, quite enjoyable. The test comes when I cross the last few meters and stand on the boundary between belief and unbelief, when I actually become involved in the lives of people, when I actually witness to Jesus Christ by word and deed, by being and doing.

Frontiers must be crossed in every land. Among the more prominent ones are social and religious, ideological and economic, cultural and linguistic, prejudicial and academic frontiers. Some are easy to cross; others are difficult. When Jesus was sent into the world he had to cross many frontiers to reach lost humankind. He actually stepped out of the mansions of heavenly glory to reach the masses of the human ghetto (cf. John 14:1-6; 17:1-5; Matt. 9:36). He took on flesh and blood. He even crossed from the realm of light and life to the sphere of darkness and death—even death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).

- Mission is Expressed as Witness in the World

Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit as the ultimate power source for cross-cultural witness. The Spirit equips us to cross frontiers, to penetrate deeply into new worlds, new languages, and new peoples. He helps us to give authentic witness on the other side of those frontiers—be that Jerusalem or Judea, Samaria or the remote corners of the globe (cf. Acts 1:8). In some instances, this aspect of mission means giving up one's life for the sake of the

gospel. Many missionaries have done so. Many are doing so in our time. Mission as witness always means the way of the cross.

Witnessing is risky and costly. We actually step out of the safe shelter of God's people into a hostile environment that is ruled by the prince of this world. It was the same for Jesus: he had to die on the cross. He never promised us shelter and safety in mission. He promised us his presence and his power, but not immunity from persecution and suffering. In fact, he said to his disciples, "They have persecuted me, and they will persecute you too" (John 15:20). Raymund Lull, the great apostle to the Muslims, said more than 650 years ago: "Missionaries will convert the world by their preaching; but also by shedding many tears, by having many hardships, by spilling their own blood, and by dying for the cause."

In countries like the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China the church has gone through tremendous tests of faith and suffering. And yet it has come out triumphant. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

In Romania I observed how Christians under oppression express their mission through a dynamic witness in a hostile world. They witness more by character and relationship than by verbal proclamation. When I asked a pastor whether he found it hard to live under oppressive conditions, he responded, "Oh no, that is normal. As Christians we are called to suffer." The Romanian Christians witness to Christ in schools, in factories, and on collective farms, and great numbers come to Christ. Those from the free world have much to learn about what it means to witness under totalitarian regimes.

May God help us to express our mission by sending, by crossing frontiers, and by witnessing to Christ on the other side of those frontiers.

#### ***4. The Historical Scope of our Mission***

Mennonite Brethren had their beginning as a revival movement in Russia more than a hundred years ago. Today Mennonite Brethren are a worldwide fellowship, though small in number. We are an integral part of the church of Jesus Christ that had its beginning at Pentecost. We stand, not isolated, but in a missionary tradition between two great events in salvation his-

tory. The ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit mark the beginning of our mission; the return of Christ will mark the end. That is the historical scope.

Curitiba 88 marks a midpoint in mission. We look back at what God has done, and we look forward to what he will do. God has built his church in 220 countries and Mennonite Brethren are present in nearly 10 percent of them. Men and women performed their missionary tasks in human frailty, demonstrating, as Paul puts it, that the "all surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

But what does all this have to do with mission today and tomorrow? How does it affect the small, but worldwide, Mennonite Brethren Church? What significance could this gathering have? I offer seven concluding comments.

First, this is a time to listen and respond to God together. The sending God of Bible times is still a sending God today. His question to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" is still relevant. Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me." And the Lord sent him (Isa. 6:8-9; cf. 6:1-13). Today the Lord asks the same questions and desires the same response.

Second, we need to obey the missionary mandate together. After his resurrection Jesus told his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20a NIV). World mission is not a question of convenience but of obedience. Together we could select one unreached people group each year and in obedience make disciples of this group. Together we could create strong mission teams and send them into two or three world-class cities to plant believers' churches.

Third, this is a call to pray out workers together. Jesus was travelling to cities and villages, teaching, preaching, and healing when his heart filled with compassion, and he said to the believers, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest that he may send out workers into the harvest" (Matt. 9:37-38). Jesus calls us to pray out workers from the worldwide Mennonite Brethren Church for the

worldwide harvest.

Fourth, we have an opportunity to experience spiritual renewal together. The same Holy Spirit who empowered and equipped the church for mission during the apostolic era is also doing so today. Our agenda is often to strategize; the Holy Spirit's agenda is to revitalize. I am convinced he wants to visit and empower us for mission in a fresh way. Our brothers and sisters from Brazil have reminded us of this.

Fifth, the Mennonite Brethren Church stands at an historical moment in its existence. Mennonite Brethren from different countries have on occasion been represented at conferences, but they have never gathered from so many countries to say, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, we have one task together: our common mission to the world." That mission will consist of preaching the gospel, feeding the hungry, promoting justice and working for peace, giving shelter to the homeless and healing the sick. The gospel of Jesus Christ, which saves people from their sin, must be kept central in every aspect of mission.

Sixth, we stand at an historical watershed of Mennonite Brethren mission. During the first hundred years, the Mennonite Brethren have sent 837 men and women to "foreign" mission fields. They have given a combined total of 7,949 years of missionary service. The result is a Mennonite Brethren Church in eighteen countries. Until Curitiba 88, all this was done primarily from the church in the West to the world in the East, and from the church in the North to the world in the South. But this is no longer so. There are areas and frontiers in the world which we must face together. We want to stand together in partnership as Mennonite Brethren across the globe, committed to one mission: the mission from the church to the world. We must be committed to one obedience: to make disciples of all peoples.

Finally, Curitiba 88 is a symbolic foretaste of what the final mission congress will be like. At that congress all of God's people from all ages and all nations will assemble before the throne of God around the Lamb of God. They will not ask who the Mennonite Brethren are; they will not ask what their mission is; they will not be concerned with strategy. They will simply reflect on the greatness, the grace, and the glory of God. They will honor him as Creator and Redeemer. They will worship him for what he has done

throughout the ages in world mission. They will be dressed in white robes as the redeemed of the Lamb. They will hold palm branches in their hands as a sign of ultimate triumph. They will be joined by hosts of angels, elders and other living beings.

They will worship God, saying, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and praise and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" (Rev. 7:12; cf. 7:9-12; 5:13 NIV, NASB).

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# Understanding the Mennonite Brethren

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Hans Pankratz (Paraguay)

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*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

*News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.*

*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 11:19-26; 13:2-3)*

## **I. God Has Been With Us**

This consultation was organized because we believe that the Mennonite Brethren have a mission to carry out in our world. Others will discuss the terms of our mission and the conditions of our world. But how do we

handle the Mennonite Brethren element? Don't we already know what this means? Not necessarily. We hear much discussion about whether we should use the term "Mennonite Brethren". Some would like to leave this term behind; others attach themselves to it with fanaticism. But the essence is not in the name but in what we are or should be as churches.

As we face this identity crisis we need to understand the Mennonite Brethren better. John E. Toews makes a pointed observation: "In an attempt to understand ourselves, our faith and our times, a two-fold question emerges: 'Who are we?' (identity) and 'What are we doing?' (mission). The increasing tension between faith and practice in congregational life may reflect a lack of clarity on both questions. Both our identity and our mission appear to be unclear and in flux. The unfinished challenge which Scripture left for first-century Christians, '... that you might straighten out what was left unfinished,' is still our mandate (Titus 1:5 NIV). Let us press on to the work of the unfinished task before us."

I don't pretend to understand the Mennonite Brethren completely; much less would I dare to teach who they are. But I hope to stir up discussion which will contribute to a better understanding of the Mennonite Brethren.

As Mennonite Brethren we are a relatively young denomination. Our history is hardly 130 years old. Our brotherhood is multi-colored, multi-national, and multi-cultural. But we form a single brotherhood. Eph. 4:5-6 tells us that we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." But this is not the exclusive domain of the Mennonite Brethren. We share this promise with a larger Mennonite family and with millions of other Christians.

Even though it may seem redundant, I want to affirm that not all Christians are Mennonite Brethren. But all Mennonite Brethren are (or should be) Christians. If we consist of only one small part within the great Christian family, what is our reason for existing as a denomination? Is there something we can offer to other Christians and to the world?

Our history proves that God has been with us and has used us to extend his kingdom. In fact, history is often the best place to look when we want to find out more about our identity. Wes Kroeker affirms this when he writes,



"By studying the history of our church we can learn to understand ourselves better and avoid some of the mistakes of the past. By accepting our past we need not be bound by empty traditions, but are free to build, change and adapt it to the needs of today's world."

I believe, based on my observation and investigation, that Mennonite Brethren are the same as other denominations: we have a theology, an ecclesiology, and an ethic which give excellent results in difficult times. The good times, however, cause problems. What is the answer? We need to carry out the Great Commission both globally and locally. An active, aggressive church rooted in the gospel will face opposition. It will have motivation to fight and it will remain constantly alert and renewed.

Statistics tell us that most Mennonite Brethren churches were started by North American missionary efforts. The North American Mennonite Brethren churches themselves are the result of a nineteenth century spiritual revival in the Russian Mennonite communities. Founding members stated their basic agreement with Mennonite church doctrine, especially the doctrine of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. The Anabaptists' original intention was to revive the early New Testament. They were not content to reform the existing church. This helps to explain the historical background which has influenced our formation, from New Testament times through the Anabaptist movement and on into the formation and development of the Mennonite Brethren denomination.

## ***2. Understanding our Spiritual Heritage***

To understand ourselves better, we need to look at church characteristics from five periods during this broad sweep of history. These churches are a part of our past, they live with us in the present, and they will shape our future. Each church will be evaluated in the following areas:

1. conflict between the church and civil or religious authorities,
2. the extent of persecution,
3. the demand for a personal relationship with God,
4. the practice of an edifying brotherhood,
5. the demonstration of missionary zeal,
6. deviations from church norms, and

## 7. confessions of faith and conduct.

### • The Early Church of the New Testament

The early church of the New Testament certainly had its share of conflict with authority. Members of the religious council called the apostles in and told them in no uncertain terms that they were not permitted to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). Governor Festus told Paul that the outcome of his arrest on a variety of charges would be decided by Caesar himself (Acts 25:12).

Church members had to endure great persecution, but the result was that a greater number of people were able to hear the gospel message: "In that day there was a great persecution against the church that was in Jerusalem and they were all scattered" (Acts 8:1). The church demanded a personal relationship with God and demonstrated sincere missionary zeal. In fact, they were so enthusiastic that they said, "We cannot keep from saying that which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

But the church could not escape some deviations from the truth. According to the letter to the Galatians, there was a threat of legalism and the temptation of false liberty. Confessions of faith were based on a group decision-making process at councils in Jerusalem, Nicea, Caledonia, and other areas.

### • The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century

The early Anabaptists were also quick to fall into disgrace before the civil and religious authorities. As a result, they suffered persecution and martyrdom to the point of near extinction.

The strength to remain faithful in spite of this opposition grew out of a strong emphasis on a personal relationship with God. Churches made up only of believers were formed. Discipleship was practiced. Hans Denk, an early leader, said, "No one can know Christ unless he follows him in his life." In congregational meetings, the Anabaptists rejected dependence on sermonizing and placed a strong emphasis on congregational participation. Some, like the Hutterites, shared their possessions with the entire community.

Anabaptists emphasized the commissioning of members for ministry. They wanted to take the Great Commission seriously. As a result, each candidate for baptism promised a willingness to be a missionary.

Some deviation—a spiritualist tendency and a certain eschatological fanaticism—crept in, but by and large the group respected its confession. The Confession of Schleithem, 1527, is the confession of faith and conduct drawn up by the first Anabaptists.

- The Founders of the Mennonite Brethren

When the eighteen founding members decided to form an independent church, they ran into strong opposition from the ecclesiastical council of the Mennonite colonies' civil administration. Even the Russian authorities were involved. Members of the brotherhood were beaten, jailed, and denied civil rights. Some were later transferred into voluntary exile.

A genuine faith and desire for a personal relationship with God was evident in their lives. Vibrant, genuine faith, not something memorized from parents or the church, was required for baptism. A new lifestyle was part of this regenerated life in Christ, and edifying fellowship was important. Bible studies, the Lord's Supper, footwashing, prayer, and singing helped build fellowship.

Missionary zeal was a dominant feature of these early Mennonite Brethren. They felt a passion for the lost, they cooperated with Bible societies and they evangelized. By 1872, the group had named five travelling evangelists.

Deviations were not unknown. The most widely known of these, the so-called *froehliche richtung* movement of exuberant happiness, carried a number of people off course. Abuse of excommunication, false liberty, and a certain spiritual arrogance were also setbacks for the new movement.

A reform movement in June, 1872 helped correct these deviations. One other noteworthy action was the decision to record the group's early history. P.M. Friesen was put in charge of the project, which was completed in 1910.

- The Emerging Churches

Every authentic church is a missionary church as it carries out the Great Commission. When this mission effort results in new churches which have their own national, cultural, and religious environment, we have emerging (or missionary) churches. In today's Mennonite Brethren family, these churches form a majority in number, dynamism and vitality.

Although statistics are difficult to find, and generalization is risky, I believe that the seven characteristics mentioned earlier are also present in these missionary churches. All have had conflicts with their respective national and religious authorities, and in one way or another have been persecuted. It is natural for new churches to emphasize a good relationship with God. And missionary zeal and evangelistic spirit are overarching features.

These churches are also open to deviation, but thanks to God they are affirmed in the faith and conduct themselves as Christians. Further discussion on this point will determine whether I am right or wrong, and will help us come to agreement in matters of faith and conduct.

- The Institutionalized Churches

When I use the term "institutionalized," I refer to a church which is organized, known, and accepted in its society. It has forms and traditions, and is what some decades ago was called an indigenous church. The institutionalized church has self government, self support, and self propagation. It is difficult for me to evaluate this church accurately since I myself am a part of it. Subjectivity may color my comments. Nevertheless, let me examine these churches.

At first glance, the characteristics mentioned above do not correspond to these churches. An exception may be in the area of missionary zeal in foreign countries and an agreement on a confession of faith.

These churches usually have a liberal outpouring of human and material resources. They are strong in orthodoxy but weak in practice. Self preservation takes up more energy than self propagation. Members generally behave more like citizens of this world than like pilgrims who are just passing through. Individualism replaces a corporate spirit of brotherhood.

### ***3. An Understanding to Shape Our Future***

These are only a few characteristics of the institutionalized churches. These churches are at a critical point in their history. They know it, and a recent return to the biblical sources of the Anabaptists is a good indication of hope for the future.

There is a new emphasis on mission, both local and global, that extends to all social strata. Wilbert R. Shenk insists that this mission emphasis

is crucial. He writes that we should be so involved in mission that a great proportion of our people are first-generation Christians.

Another positive sign is our rediscovery of a lifestyle patterned after New Testament believers. They gathered together for mutual edification so they could glorify God by way of service and obedience, says John E. Toews. The lordship of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit are no longer unimportant elements of our doctrine and day-to-day life.

Mennonite Brethren are part of the great people of God. Our history reveals many experiences and beliefs which are similar to those of the early New Testament church. Institutionalized churches also help.

This international consultation of Mennonite Brethren encourages us, unites us, and stimulates us to further thinking and action. Together we want to extend the kingdom of God as he works in and through us. We acknowledge God's grace and presence in guiding us to this point, but we also need to remember the caution expressed by J.B. Toews: "The living faith of the dead can come to be the dead faith of the living."

This consultation proves that we do not form an international organization but rather a non-national organization. We are not ethnic or non-ethnic Mennonites but rather multi-ethnic. We are not an anti-cultural brotherhood but a multi-cultural brotherhood. In the words of Howard J. Loewen, we confess one Lord, one church, one hope, and one God.

We have been able to confront and survive difficult times. Will we also emerge victorious from tranquil times? How do we define difficult times—or good times—for the church? J.B. Toews says that the recent life of the church has been normal in Russia and abnormal in America.

While recognizing God's sovereign role in our mission, we must do our best to conserve or recover a healthy biblicism and a contextualized communication of the divine message.

We must admit that, as Mennonite Brethren, we have neglected the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Afraid of our ability to control his manifestations, we lack the fulness of the Holy Spirit in our churches. Yet, paradoxically, these are the same spiritual gifts which edify the church. This same Holy Spirit empowers us for the missionary task.

Our value as Mennonite Brethren does not lie in our inheritance

from the past. Our value is measured by how we live now and by the direction we set for the future. As we focus on this direction, we must conserve the characteristics of the early Christians, and we must learn from the other members of our worldwide family. This consultation can and must help us to understand ourselves better as Mennonite Brethren.

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# Mission in Times of Conflict

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Paul G. Hiebert (U.S.)

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*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy. (Heb. 11:37-38)*

For those of us from North America, this is a strange mission text. We are not used to thinking of carrying on mission in times of conflict and war or of people being killed for their faith. We think of mission as a peacetime activity. We place a high priority on personal security and comfort and expect our government to protect us. We assume the work we do is limited by the funds we have.

## ***1. Conflict and the Early Church***

The picture was far different in the New Testament. The world was in turmoil when God sent his only Son as a missionary. The Roman Empire had conquered the Jews, but they were in constant rebellion. Jewish terrorists like Barabbas ambushed the Roman soldiers who patrolled the streets. Roman secret agents infiltrated rebel movements, and those who were captured were crucified outside Jerusalem. The cross was a sign of political execution.

It was into this world of conflict that Jesus came. His earthly parents were politically displaced people, ordered by a foreign dictator to leave their home. Jesus himself was considered a potential threat to the nation when he was born, so Herod sent troops to kill him. To make certain they succeeded, the troops slaughtered every baby boy in the village. Jesus spent his first years as a refugee in Egypt. When the political situation got better, his parents

moved back to Nazareth to begin life over again.

After he began his ministry, Jesus was accused of being an anti-national and a subversive. Spies followed his movements. Enemies tried to trap him. In the end, he was accused of treason and brought to trial on false charges. He was brutally beaten by soldiers who acted on orders from above. He was publicly shamed and crucified between two political criminals as a terrorist and an enemy of the state. They killed God's first missionary.

The same thing is recorded in Acts. Peter and John healed a lame man and ended up in jail. Stephen, a layman, began to preach and was stoned to death. Paul wrote:

*Five times I was lashed, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (2 Cor. 11:25-27)*

As the Christians spread and the church grew, opposition increased. In A.D. 64 Nero, the emperor, began the first great persecution. He had agents burn the city of Rome and blamed it on the Christians, branding them disloyal to the nation. He had them wrapped in the skins of wild animals and thrown to hungry dogs. He staged contests in great stadiums in which they had to fight tigers with their bare hands. He had them buried up to their necks along his driveway and had fires lit on their heads when he drove by. But the godly suffering of the Christians won the sympathy of the people. They sang hymns in their jail cells; they blessed their persecutors; they praised God as they died in the fires. Many were impressed by their deep faith and transformed lives. Many believed, only to become martyrs themselves.

Between A.D. 64 and A.D. 312 there were some ten major persecutions. The Roman emperors feared Christianity because it was revolutionary—it demanded the ultimate allegiance of the people. So they ordered everyone to bow before the image of Caesar. Christians who refused were branded traitors, imprisoned, and killed. Christians were accused of being



anti-social because they refused to participate in pagan festivals. When a great plague struck the empire in A.D. 251 the Christians were blamed, since they had neglected the old gods.

What lessons can we learn from this? First, the early church grew rapidly in a time of social and political conflict. It grew because the early Christians had a passion for evangelism—a passion that was stronger than their fear of suffering and death. They saw the lostness of humans and the greatness of God's salvation.

Second, the Christians found extraordinary ways to evangelize. Philip witnessed to a foreign diplomat on a desert road. Paul and Silas led their jailer to Christ. Lydia gathered friends in her home. Servants witnessed to their masters. Thomas was sold as a slave to a king in South India. He won the favor of the king and planted a church.

Can mission be carried on in times of conflict? The early church had no other choice. They witnessed in season and out of season, when there was peace and when there was war, when they had money and when they were poor, when they were living and when they were dying.

## ***2. The Wedding of Church and State***

The picture changed after A.D. 312. Constantine, the Roman Emperor, was converted, and he made Christianity the official religion of the state. For the next fifteen hundred years the church looked to the state for protection, support and finances. Missionaries followed the soldiers who conquered Europe, and troops often marched the vanquished to the river for baptism. Many who refused baptism were killed. Bishops had armies, bore arms, and administered law and order. The parishes acquired land and ran businesses. In many cases, the church was more interested in acquiring territory and converting the people by means of the sword than by the gospel.

*As the numerical triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire had been completed by mass conversion, encouraged and later enforced by the Emperors, so in these smaller (tribes and peoples) which made up Western Europe in this period, that faith was adopted as the religion of the community, usually at the command or at least with the energetic assistance of the prince.*

*(Latourette, Kenneth Scott, 1975, A History of Christian. Volume 1, New York: Harper and Row, p.351)*

There were exceptions—people who depended on God and not the state. Columba went with twelve companions as a missionary to evangelize the unconquered tribes of Scotland and England; Willibrord evangelized Holland; and Wynfrith evangelized Germany. The Goths were converted through Christians who were captured in raids. Nestorian traders brought the gospel to China and Afghanistan from Persia. The Slavs of Poland were first evangelized by a woman forced to marry a Slavic prince.

The faithfulness of these mission-minded people was not strong enough, however, to keep the world from identifying Christianity with Western power and colonialism. Too often the explorer, the colonial administrator, and the missionary arrived together. Too often the church depended upon a Western government for protection and support.

What lessons can we learn from this period in history? First, because it was wedded to the state, Christianity came to be seen as a Western religion. During the colonial era, this opened the door for missionaries to go to many lands, but it also made the gospel foreign in those lands. In many parts of the world, to become Christian was to become Western in dress and thought. Christians were accused of being anti-Indian, anti-African, and anti-Japanese. This identification of the gospel with Western political and cultural power has done great damage to the missionary outreach of the church.

Second, the church in the West increasingly depended upon Western governments for protection and security. Missions often began after colonial rule had been established and the danger of persecution and violence had subsided. Sending churches came to put their trust in their governments rather than in God.

### ***3. The Modern Church and Conflict***

Today the picture is changing again. We are entering the third era in the life of the church. Two facts illustrate the transition. First, the West is losing its dominance. There are now more than 160 nations; Japan, China, India, Latin America, and Africa are emerging as new centers of world power.

This political and economic realignment is creating great tensions and conflicts on the world scene. An estimated twenty-four wars were fought from 1900 to 1940, and from 1940 to the present more than 130 have been fought. Presently more than forty small wars are being waged throughout the world, involving more than 4 million soldiers. The cost of these conflicts is high. The world spends more than \$700 billion on wars and military preparations each year—more than twice what it spends on food, and five times as much as it spends on peace. The cost in human terms is even higher. There are more than 20 million refugees, and millions more have been displaced.

There are also religious conflicts due to the rise of Muslim and Hindu fundamentalism. One consequence of this is that almost 87 percent of the world's people live in lands closed to mission work.

Another cause of conflict in today's world is the rapid move of people to the cities. In 1900 only 5.5 percent of the world's population lived in cities larger than 100,000 people. Today close to 33 percent do. In 1900 there were no cities with 5 million inhabitants. By 2000 A.D. there will be sixty-five. Twenty-four of these will have more than 10 million. More than 430 cities will have more than 1 million people.

One consequence of this massive movement of people to the cities is a marked rise in conflict between rich and poor, between ethnic groups, and between religious communities forced to live next to each other. Urban riots and gangs have become ways of life in many parts of the world. Homelessness, poverty, broken families, and fear are all that many know of human existence.

The second fact pointing to a new era in church history is the internationalization of the church. Today whites are a minority in the world church. In A.D. 1900 they constituted 83 percent of all Christians. Today they constitute 45 percent. By A.D. 2000 they will be only one third. The same is true of the Mennonite Brethren. The largest Mennonite Brethren churches are now in Africa and India. For the first time in history, the church is truly transnational.

This internationalization of the church has been accompanied by persecution and suffering. Most Christians live in countries where they cannot turn to the government for protection. In some cases their governments

are among the persecutors.

What lessons can we learn from these churches living in conflict and opposition? First, it is clear that conflicts shake peoples' faith foundations and make them more responsive to the gospel. Throughout history, people have been more open to conversion in times of political and social unrest. Let us look at a few contemporary examples.

In 1960 the church in Indonesia was small and struggling. Then a civil war erupted in which more than 300,000 were killed. The Christians showed nonviolent love and hospitality and provided a refuge for many who were fleeing for their lives. Since then some three to four million Muslims have become Christians; they were won by the faithful, loving witness of the Christians.

A similar story can be told about our churches in Zaire. There was a violent rebellion at the time of independence, and many Christians suffered severe persecution. Among them was Pastor Kasai Kapata, who was captured and buried up to his neck. Three days later he was freed by one of the rebels who had been his Sunday school student many years before. Kasai, like many others, spent months with his family living in the forest. Out of this suffering came a living church.

A third example is Afghanistan. In 1970 Afghani Christians numbered a few dozen. Then the war began and the Afghans fled to Pakistan by the tens of thousands. There many of them heard the gospel in refugee camps and came to Christ. Today there are an estimated ten thousand Afghan Christians—many times more than there would have been had there been no war.

A final example is Korea. The Korean War killed tens of thousands, and whole populations fled to the south as refugees. There leaders such as Dr. Han began to minister to the refugees, and the church was born in cities such as Seoul, Pusan, and Tegu. Out of this conflict and the social disruptions which it created, the church today is reaping a great harvest.

The second lesson we learn is that persecution brings new life to the church. We should not pray for persecution. But when suffering comes, it often purifies the church and gives it new life. For Christians, victory often comes by the way of the cross.

This was certainly true of the early Anabaptists. They committed

themselves to radical obedience to Christ in a time of wars and social instability. Many of them were burned, drowned, and killed by the sword. Their leaders were all martyrs within a few years.

The same thing is happening now in Nepal. When mission work first began in Nepal in the 1960s, Nepali converts were imprisoned and persecuted, but they continued to witness boldly. Today there are more than forty-four cases against Nepali Christians in the courts, but the church has grown to more than 100,000.

We think also of China. When the missionaries had to leave in the early 1950s, there were less than 4 million Christians. Then the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976 brought a reign of terror and persecution. Bibles were burned, religious meetings were banned, and church buildings were converted into warehouses and factories. Most pastors and elders were put in jail, but their wives carried on the work in secret. Out of this persecution came a living church that has grown rapidly. Today there are possibly as many as 30 million Chinese Christians—seven times as many as in 1950. This is the most rapid growth of the church anywhere in all of history.

Similar reports come from Russia and Romania. Hans Kasdorf reports that in Romania Christians are harassed, and religious gatherings are severely restricted. Those caught holding private religious meetings in their homes are fined up to two years' wages. Nevertheless, Christians continue to meet to pray for the conversion of those who rule them; congregations are growing rapidly, and even soldiers and policemen are coming to Christ.

These are general stories, each of which is made of thousands of stories of individual faith and heroism. One such story has to do with our Mennonite Brethren church in Pedda Danvada, India. Some years ago forty families of untouchables in Pedda Danvada became Christians. They sent their children to school and their economic conditions improved. The high caste village leaders became angry because these untouchables were no longer subservient to them. They warned the Christians to return to Hinduism and finally organized a riot in which the Christians were beaten. The elders also forbade the Christians to draw water at the only village well located a half mile outside of town. The Christian women had to go an additional half mile to the river for all their water.

The church gathered to pray. It raised money for a well and got a government loan. The Christians began digging in the middle of the village where many others had failed before. Twice they struck rock and were forced to try again. Again they hit rock, and in desperation they decided to blast until their money ran out. After a few feet of granite, they struck sand, and at thirty feet they found a good supply of water. God had answered their prayers. But then an amazing thing happened. The church sent a delegation to the high caste people saying, "Come and draw water at our well. There is enough for all of us. Why should your women go so far for water?" This was a powerful testimony to many who saw how Christ had transformed the lives of the Christians.

Today, the persecution of Christians is increasing in many parts of the world. David Barrett estimates that 300,000 Christians die for their faith each year—the highest number in all of history!

#### **4. Mission in Times of Conflict**

Can we do mission in times of conflict? That is not the real question. The real question is, *Can we retain a vital commitment to mission when we live in peace, plenty and security?* Can we retain a passion to minister to the lost and needy that takes priority over our own security and comfort? The world expects its soldiers to die in battle in defense of the nation. We must expect no less of ourselves in mission.

Closely related to this is a second question: *Do we as Mennonite Brethren have a particular responsibility to minister in places of conflict?* Given our history of suffering, our concern for the whole gospel, peace, reconciliation and nonviolence, and our view of the church as a counter-national community, are we in a unique position to minister to those caught up in wars, racial tensions and class hatreds? Or have we in North America forgotten in two generations the lessons our forefathers learned in Europe? Should we mobilize special teams to live and minister in the great urban slums, in places of racial conflict? Should we bear witness in Lebanon, or Ethiopia, or Central America, or South Africa?

Ultimately, the question is whether we are willing to witness in season and out of season, in times of war and in times of peace, in jail as well

as out of jail, when we are rich and when we are poor, in our deaths as well as in our lives.

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# Vision and Strategy for the Mennonite Brethren Mission

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Victor Adrian (Canada)

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*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph. 2:14-18)*

*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:13)*

*He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:14-15)*

## ***1. Christ's Vision For the World: Our Vision***

As we approach the end of the twentieth century we face the critical question of whether we want Christ's vision for the world to shape our destiny. Will we devote the best of our energies and resources to complete the mission he gave us?

As never before, we live in a world of opportunity and challenge. The world is searching for hope and a better future; men and women are in a quest for spiritual realities which will give them strength and ability to cope with life. People are searching for an experience with God to give meaning

and purpose to human existence.

The Mennonite Brethren church, planted in almost 20 countries around the world, is able to draw on resources it could not have imagined 100 years ago. Providentially, the Lord has opened doors for us on five continents. Through faithful witnesses and the Spirit of God, living churches have been established among many peoples. Now is the time for us to unite our spiritual and physical resources to bring Christ's life and light to those not yet reached by the gospel. This calls for vision and strategy.

The people God uses are spiritual people with vision. Clear vision and workable strategies are essential if we want to participate meaningfully in God's mission on earth. Vision links dream and action. It enables us to reach our goals.

People with vision have a clear sense of direction. They understand God's design for the world, grasp it passionately and pursue it wholeheartedly. With vision, we too can face the future with hope, courage, confidence, and joy. A church filled with vision ventures forth with fresh steps of faith under the banner of Christ, the Lord.

The Bible tells us that without vision the people perish (Prov. 29:18). If we fail to grasp God's vision or God's revelation of the future, we depart from his ways and face despair and hopelessness.

God has always graciously placed his vision for the future before us, revealing his plans for human history. He never intended us to grope about in darkness. After the Fall, Adam and Eve were called to focus their hopes on Christ's triumphant victory on the cross. The seed of the woman would triumph over the seed of the serpent. Abraham was called from life among the gods of Babylon so that through him all families on earth would be blessed. Filled with God's vision, Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God (Heb. 11). Later, the prophets shared the vision of the Messiah and his kingdom, revealing that he would be a light not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles.

Jesus gave his followers a clear, unequalled vision. He promised that they would do greater works than he had (John 14). He revealed that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached as a testimony to all the nations—and then the end would come (Matt. 24). These promises were followed up

with a command to go and disciple all the nations.

This vision received its empowerment on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God broke into human history in a remarkable way. A new era was initiated: sons and daughters would prophesy; young men would see visions; and old men would dream dreams. When the church is alive with the Holy Spirit and people are filled with him, God's vision comes alive and the impulse for mission becomes strong. Every revival in the church has produced a new impulse for mission. There can be no question, therefore, that vision is essential and God-given, and that it gives a clear sense of direction, courage, and hope. What is Christ's vision for the world?

The world as it is today is a gross distortion of God's intention and Christ's vision. When Jesus came into the world he expressed profound indignation with the world as he saw it: its moral and spiritual blindness, its diseases, its deaths, its hunger, its violence, and its injustice. It was a world alienated from God and God's purposes.

The world was also in a desperate plight. Because it was outside of Christ, it was excluded from the covenants of promise. It was without hope and without God (Eph. 2). We need to see the world as our Lord saw it: a world alienated from God, without Christ and therefore without hope. Jesus knew that something had to be done.

He came into this world with a powerful vision. He came to save the world, not to condemn it (John 3). His death and resurrection, the birth of the church and its subsequent commission, and the outpouring of the Spirit were all part of Christ's vision to save the world. And he gave himself to that vision with every ounce of his strength. It preoccupied his mind and his life. "My meat and drink," he said, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4). For this Christ lived. For this he died. How would he save the world?

- Creating a New Humanity

Through his blood, Christ created a new humanity on earth. Through him, people were reconciled to God and to each other. All nations, tribes, and tongues were called to create a unique company of believers, a living church, a new society. Paul expressed that hope so eloquently in his letter to the Ephesians:

*His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:15-18).*

Christ had a splendid vision for the world. He saw a new society characterized by life, unity, righteousness, love, and peace—not death, injustice, hatred, and strife. It would be a society reconciled to God and humanity through faith in Christ. It would merge in all parts of the world through the preaching of the gospel and the discipling of all nations. As a church, we need to keep that vision alive as we bend our minds and hearts to accomplish it.

- Creating a New Heaven and a New Earth

The second major goal envisioned by Christ was to create a new heaven and a new earth through his second coming (2 Pet. 3:13). This hope of Christ's coming and the establishment of his kingdom of righteousness must burn brightly in the hearts of his people. It will be a day of definitive victory over all evil. It will be the end of hunger, suffering, violence and injustice. The world will become a place of peace, love and righteousness. This great hope is profoundly related to the church's mission today.

Christ's followers are not happy with the world as it is today. They are not indifferent to the moral and spiritual confusion, the illiteracy, the injustice and violence. They share Christ's desire to see people change and the world transformed.

There is no greater liberating cause—and no vision that is better—than Christ's vision for the world. Liberation which does not have Christ and the Holy Spirit at the center, or which does not have concern for evangelism and church planting at the center, falls far short of Christ's cause. We need to grasp Christ's vision firmly and devote all our energy to fulfilling it in our day.

## ***2. Christ's Strategy for the World: Our Strategy***

Christ modelled a strategy to carry out his vision. He laid the foundation for that strategy when he called the Twelve and gave them their as-

signment:

*He appointed twelve--designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:14,15).*

• Appointed to be with Christ

The first step in Christ's strategy is fundamental: we are to pre-occupy ourselves with Christ. We are to live a life of intimacy with Christ. We must abide in him before we can be fruitful. The key question Jesus asked Peter before giving him his assignment was, "Do you love me?" (John 21:17) Paul summed up the intimate union of his new life in Christ when he said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). More than anything else, Jesus wants us to share his life, so that through the Spirit of God he can guide, illumine, comfort, and empower us.

The Lord used those who were close to him. Moses prepared himself for his challenging task by entering into periods of great intimacy with God. In Exod. 33, we read that he took his tent outside the camp, called it the meeting place with God, and spent much time with the Lord. His prayers were filled with requests and intercession, but reached their climax when he expressed his soul's deepest longing: "Let me see your glory!" (Exod. 33:18).

David longed for the refreshing presence of God continually: "As a deer panteth after the water brooks, so my soul panteth after Thee, oh God" (Ps. 42). He summed up the highest priority of his spiritual discipline this way: "One thing I've asked of the Lord that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27).

Paul felt an extraordinary desire to be with Christ and to live intimately with him. He wrote of his desire to "know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering" (Phil. 3:10). This fervent desire after God, this deep aspiration to identify with Christ, is basic to Christian discipleship. It is fundamental in Christ's strategy to evangelize the world.

Jesus modelled such a life with God during his earthly pilgrimage.

He sometimes withdrew from exacting ministries in order to spend time alone with God. Luke puts it this way: "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). He trained his disciples in the same discipline, encouraging them to first spend time with God and then move into ministries in the world. Their ministries were to be shaped and empowered by continual, intimate fellowship with Christ their Lord.

Why is it so important to incorporate fellowship with Christ into our evangelism strategy? There can be no power in Christians or in the church without a conscious abiding in Christ. Without this fellowship, there can be no vision, no direction, no authority.

Intimacy with Christ means sharing his life in a growing way. It means being indwelt and filled by the Holy Spirit, living in a conscious relationship with him. This close relationship brings courage, comfort and strength. The promise of the Scriptures is that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will mount up as eagles; they will run and not be weary; they will walk and not faint (Isa. 40:31).

Intimacy with Christ also means that we share our burdens and anxieties with him. What a tremendous privilege it is to have a listening God who wants to hear from us. The Bible has more exhortations to pray than for any other activity. Bringing our anxieties and requests for understanding before the Lord is the way to peace and wisdom. All of us may claim the promise which God gave to Jeremiah: "Call on me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things you do not know" (Jer. 33). Living with Christ brings constant renewal and refreshment; it enlarges our understanding of the mind and will of God; it empowers; it makes us effective in ministry. Individually and corporately, we must meditate on Christ, speak to Christ, and listen to Christ.

Augustine, Luther, Menno Simons, Spener, Wesley, Hudson Taylor, and William Carey could not have carried out their full ministry without an intimate relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There can be no effective strategy without that relationship.

May God give us a deep thirst to be with him. We need this spirituality from day to day on the road of ministry. We need to plan for it daily. Nothing holds more promise than cultivating a daily relationship with

Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Appointed to Preach

Jesus gave priority to the preaching of the kingdom of God in his strategy for world evangelization (Luke 9:1). The church of Jesus Christ must occupy itself with church growth. To preach the word is to penetrate the world for Christ.

This aspect of our Lord's strategy presupposes a world-formation view. It suggests an outward-looking church passionately concerned with calling an alienated world back to God, and changing the world through the power of the gospel.

Too much self-preoccupation is unhealthy, both for the individual Christian and for the church. Too much introspection—a preoccupation with changing structures, with buildings, with the minutiae of doctrine, with institutions—can rob the church of its power in the world. Right doctrine is very important; a measure of organization is necessary; some institutions are needed. But unless these help us reach out into the world more effectively, they stifle the power of the churches.

Jesus' strategy was to send his followers into the world to save it. He went from city to city preaching the gospel with a sense of urgency. The life he offered was to spread in ever-widening circles around the world. All areas were to be penetrated for Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to work freely. "As the Father sent me so send I you," Christ instructed his followers (John 20:21).

In the eyes of Jesus, proclaiming the word of God was absolutely necessary. Jesus came preaching the Word (Mark 1:15). He sent the Twelve to preach the kingdom of God; he promised that the end of the world would not come before the gospel of the kingdom had been preached to all nations. Unless people hear, they cannot have a living faith.

What is this kingdom of God we are to preach? The kingdom of God is Christ's rule in our hearts. It is a rule which brings life; it liberates and frees from bondage; it brings righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; it creates a people of God—the church, the body of Christ; it empowers for ministry. This kingdom is to have first priority in each of our lives.

The kingdom of God is also dynamic and growing. This kingdom

will triumph over all other kingdoms of the world (Dan. 2).

We are to preach the kingdom of God, verbally sharing the good news in Christ. Many Christians try to be a Christian presence in this world, but they fail to share the gospel verbally. Many, including Mennonite Brethren, are good, moral, dependable people. They have a good family life and they perform good deeds, but they do not verbally encourage people to become disciples of Christ. We are generally strong in having a Christian presence in society; we are generally poor as proclaimers of the gospel.

Christ's strategy ought to rouse us to action. We need to overcome our weaknesses. We need to encourage verbal proclamation of the word. We need to train others how to articulate the gospel to the secular minded, to the indifferent, to those of other religions. We need to provide suitable literature and to foster evangelical discussion and Bible study groups.

Christians frequently do not understand that many people around us yearn to know what life is all about, to know inner peace and cleansing. Many around us are looking for a faith strong enough to overcome anxieties, a faith which brings greater fulfillment in life.

The Bible tells us that all people are created with eternity in their hearts. They are made to know God and remain restless until they find him. We need to have compassion on men and women around us, a compassion which leads to speaking, preaching, and teaching Christ to them. Indeed, speaking to others with love and sensitivity is at the heart of Christ's strategy for the world.

- Appointed to Cast out Demons

To be a disciple of Christ means to accept the biblical worldview. Christ came into this world to engage in fierce combat; he came to free us from our bondage to principalities and powers. The ruler of this world seeks to hold humankind in darkness and blindness, keeping us from discovering our own sinfulness. We know that to understand Christ we must understand the reality of human fallenness and the glorious liberty of those who through faith are united with Christ. Today's world is an arena which Christ has entered to defeat Satan and those associated with him. We are called to wrestle with these principalities and powers in the power of Christ.

Jesus came to free humankind from spiritual bondage, and often this



meant casting out demons by the Spirit of God. He passed this authority over demons to his followers, entrusting them with ongoing power for spiritual battle.

Casting out demons is responding compassionately to human need. It demonstrates the power of Christ over every obstacle in human existence. In Christ we are made free; this means that an important part of Christ's strategy in the world is to cast out demons, heal diseases, and free people from oppression. Our task is to carry on the ministry of Christ in his name. We minister to human need through all the healing power associated with Christ—sometimes the Word, sometimes prayer, and sometimes medicine. While not all are healed in every way, they can be spiritually free and enjoy grace and peace in Christ.

### ***3. Partnership in Mission: Jesus' Strategy for World Evangelization***

Jesus called all his followers to evangelize the world. World mission is not only a Western responsibility. We want to commit ourselves to a worldwide partnership in mission.

Recently a mission leader from another Mennonite denomination said to me that national churches need an international family. In an international family members learn from each other, encourage each other, pray for each other, and cooperate together in carrying out Christ's mission.

#### **• Combining our Resources**

How can we cooperate more effectively as we face the twenty-first century? We can combine our resources to evangelize the world. First, we need to combine our spiritual resources—the spiritual insights and perspectives acquired through our experiences with Christ. Representatives from national Mennonite Brethren churches have met with Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services to share insights and to see how our spiritual resources can be used for cooperative efforts in mission.

Second, we need to combine our personnel resources. As churches grow, they become "sending" churches. Every church needs to send some of its members to unevangelized regions. The church in Antioch, while in prayer and fasting, heard the Spirit say that Paul and Barnabas were to be sent out

as their missionaries. With that first sending the mission of the church was launched. In the same way, the worldwide Mennonite Brethren Church is called to be a sending church.

- Sending Missionaries Where Most Needed

Where should missionaries be sent? They must be sent where they are most needed. Every national church must seek out the unevangelized in its own country and then seek to minister there. Every national church should also look beyond its own borders. Some countries are hardly touched by the gospel, while others have much opportunity to hear about Christ. We must never lose sight of the peoples of the world who have not had opportunity to hear the gospel. There are approximately 3 billion people with no access to the gospel. It is our privilege and duty to reach them. It is also a joy to know that we have some international mission teams at work already. We want to strengthen this international missionary force as we face the future.

Third, we need to plan together how to evangelize the world. As national church representatives have met with Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services, we have rejoiced in our past and present efforts at planning and working together *in each country*. This is a good developing partnership.

- Regional Planning

In addition to internal planning within a given country, we have discussed regional planning and the need to carry out our mission together in international cooperation. This may mean that Asian Mennonite Brethren leaders will join with Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services to plan future mission efforts in Asia. Latin American leaders may plan together for our mission in Latin America. Future mission developments will increasingly reflect an international viewpoint, a true international partnership. To this we are committed.

A great challenge—and opportunity—lies before us today. Jesus' vision for the world is clear. He intends to create a new humanity, consisting of peoples drawn from all nations. We are called to be instrumental in achieving this goal as we present the gospel to all humankind. We are called to disciple all nations. We must bring all to a true freedom in Christ. We must liberate men and women from spiritual and physical bondage. We can do this as we seek intimacy with Christ in our daily lives. We need his grace, his wis-

dom, his direction, and his empowerment. Let us unite and advance in Christian partnership to reach the world for Christ!

*Victor Adrian is the General Secretary of Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*



# **Contemporary Theological and Mission Issues**

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## ***1. Effective Church Growth Strategies (I)***

Shindany Fumu (Zaire)

- **A biblical base**

Church growth has a solid foundation in the Holy Scriptures. Matt. 28:17-20; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8 all indicate that the church cannot be stagnant; it must gather all people of the world around Christ. Acts 9:31 indicates the church's growth as it "lives in the fear of the Lord." The disciples understood the importance of strategy for church growth.

- **Early church strategy**

For the early church, evangelistic success rested largely on the strategies of members. They taught the fundamental truths of the gospel, they assumed that spiritual strength was important, and they lived a lifestyle consistent with these beliefs. They were zealous for the Word, and emphasized repentance, baptism, and holiness.

When Paul began his missionary activity, his understanding of church growth had two dimensions: the universal proclamation of the gospel and the numerical growth of the church. He adopted a geographic strategy, travelling to many cities and proclaiming the gospel in jails, synagogues, public places, and homes. Paul was a master at adapting to local situations; this cultural adaptability, and the fact that Paul did not evangelize alone, were important to Paul's strategy.

- **Early church growth strategy in Zaire**

The first Mennonite Brethren worker in Zaire, Aaron Janzen, combined social and commercial projects with church work. A self-financing plantation was established, and students were taught to read the Bible at school. One of the best evangelistic strategies was to focus on the village

chief first. Once he was converted, it was much easier to reach the other villagers.

As the missionary group grew, the commercial strategy was downplayed. Other programs were started, and the importance of a pure Christian life was emphasized. This framework, however, emphasized a code of rigid prohibitions, and the numerical growth of the church was slowed.

- Current strategies in Zaire

A program of evangelism has now been accepted and modified by the church to encourage church growth: seminars for all levels of church leadership; Christian literature and Theological Education by Extension; home visits, Bible studies, and evangelistic campaigns; church planting teams to start new churches in cities; and division of large churches when they reach a certain size. Financially, though, the churches struggle to find money for the work because most Christians are poor.

- Continuing strategies

Winning souls through *evangelism* is the primary objective both near and far. This needs to happen in various *geographic areas*: among unreached peoples, where there are felt needs and in the public squares of large urban centers. When considering the *human resources* needed for the work, involving laity in the task is vital. *Culturally*, church workers will need to be sensitive in adapting to local situations. *Economically*, the church must not disregard its responsibility for economic issues.

When one travels on a journey, one stops from time to time to look back. In the case of church growth strategies, there should be regular *evaluation* to ensure that strategies remain relevant.

## **2. Effective Church Growth Strategies (II)**

Takao Nakamura (Japan)

- A healthy church grows

The church has an awesome responsibility given by God: to be his agents in communicating the good news of salvation to the lost. Who are the lost? They are obviously those who have not heard and accepted the good news that Jesus died for their sins on the cross.

This assignment is more clearly detailed in Matt. 28:19-20, where Jesus indicates that evangelism is not only bringing people to a decision for Christ but also discipling them. The Jerusalem church was a model for this. It added three thousand believers at Pentecost. They were baptized, grew in understanding, worshipped together, joined fellowship groups, practiced good stewardship, and exercised their spiritual gifts. As a result, the church grew (Acts 2:47). This was a healthy church, since one characteristic of healthy churches is that they grow. It is God's will that churches grow.

- Signs of a healthy church

- C. Peter Wagner has indicated seven vital signs of a healthy church:

- a. A pastor whose dynamic leadership catalyzes the church into action
    - b. A well-mobilized laity which uses its spiritual gifts for growth;
    - c. A church big enough to provide services needed by its members;
    - d. A proper balance between celebration, congregation and cell groups
    - e. A membership drawn primarily from one homogeneous unit;
    - f. Evangelistic methods which make disciples; and
    - g. Priorities arranged in biblical order.

- Vision and strategy

Soul winning and disciple making are primary tasks for each congregation. In order to grow, churches must form ten or twenty-year plans and work toward them. Then time and resources can be used effectively for growth. Central to this is the divine rhythm of the church's life: gathering for worship and edification, then scattering into the world to confess Christ. This cycle fills numerous functions. It cultivates worship, promotes Christian education, equips members for service, promotes evangelism, shepherds souls, practices Christian charity, cultivates fellowship, and administers church affairs.

- Strategy for growth

Developing effective strategy involves analyzing, setting goals,

developing programs and then evaluating the results. This framework gives a deep sense of meaning to the daily activities of the church, and it enables leaders to evaluate the quality of their efforts periodically. G.W. Peters outlined several important elements for this process: clearly defined goals, a realistic timetable, the discovery of all possible resources, the mobilization of personnel and means to do the work, an appropriate training program, finding the most efficient methods, setting up an appropriate organizational structure, and the Holy Spirit's presence in all aspects of the program.

- Japanese church growth

*Japanese churches need vision, goal-directed activities, and well-arranged meetings.* Most Japanese begin to experience tension when trains are two minutes late or people five minutes late; for North Americans, it is fifteen minutes late; and for Latin Americans, one hour late. Japanese have specific objectives and want to accomplish them, often preferring to focus their attention on only one thing. *The church focuses on persons and relationships, showing love to those who often don't find it elsewhere.* This is a new experience for many in Japan, where other people are often viewed merely as part of work. *Church leaders share ministry with laity.* Decisions are made collectively, using the model favored in Japan. Many small groups tackle problems.

### ***3. Principles of New Testament Church Leadership (I)***

Makoto Ishiga (Japan)

When looking at New Testament church leadership, the primary resource is the book of Acts. I would like to suggest one verse as a basis for this discussion:

*Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*  
(Acts 9:31)

- The nature of the church in Jerusalem

Here we find a group joined together by fervent prayer, born by the Holy Spirit, brought together through evangelism, strengthened by the min-



istry of God's Word, and willing to give material aid to people in need.

The earliest organization included people to fill the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Deacons and elders were also important leaders. As time went on, the organization shifted in response to new needs or the recognition of gifts. Leaders were absorbed in prayer, evangelism and ministry of the Word. Disciples were made. The gospel saturated the local church, and administration and organizational tasks were assumed by the deacons.

- The nature of the church in Antioch

Antioch was a lay church. It was founded by laity, and its growth was stimulated and carried on by laity. Barnabas was sent here to help develop leaders who would continue this leadership.

The Antioch church gave priority to evangelism. They exhibited a fellowship of love by sharing their possessions, and they placed a high value was on teaching. Leaders who were confirmed by the church were expected to train disciples.

In both Jerusalem and Antioch, the church followed the model of Jesus Christ. This was evident in two areas of ministry: a healthy teaching/preaching ministry and a spirit of compassion.

How did the church in Antioch apply this mission? They discovered gifts and made sure that these were used actively. They assigned personnel to appropriate positions, building up the church. They cared for the needy, built biblical foundations and reached out to the lost. In all things, they sought to glorify God.

- Strategies to achieve the goal

The early church in Acts exhibits some of the major factors which contribute to church growth: a concrete vision, including goals; a knowledge of what to include or exclude in its strategy; unity which resulted from members' devotion to God, to fellow believers and to society; and the recognition of the pastor's preaching ministry and the role of leaders. The leader is the key to church growth. Acts presents the need for leadership and gives direction for the work of these leaders. Good co-workers are also invaluable for meaningful nurture and fellowship.

- Application

When evangelism to the Gentiles began, churches began to expand rapidly. Why? Faithful leaders had been prepared to serve the churches. These centrally located churches could then evangelize surrounding areas.

Paul and his co-workers never stayed long in a new church. They trained leaders for the flock. Paul then let these leaders evangelize the rest of the area.

What can we learn from Paul? We need several ingredients for success: a worldwide missionary vision; good leaders and co-workers; trained lay leaders; cooperative church planting ventures; an emphasis on strong, qualified leadership, and supporting, sending, giving churches.

No specific pattern of leadership is prescribed in Scripture, but guiding principles are given. Leaders must encourage and equip believers to use their gifts. The Holy Spirit should help us establish new structures as they are needed. The Spirit provides the power and authority needed by Christian leadership to build up the body of Christ.

#### ***4. Principles of New Testament Church Leadership (II)***

Franz Rathmair (Austria)

- The body image

Every theology of church leadership is based upon an understanding of the church. Probably the best expression of this understanding is the body image. We view the church as a living organism which grows through the power of its divine head. Leaders are not mediators between God and his people: all believers have immediate access to God's presence. All are called to follow God by serving and loving others and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

- The ultimate leader gives leaders to the church

The New Testament teaches the supreme headship of Christ. He is the origin of the church's life. Significantly, church leaders in the New Testament are never called "heads" or placed above other members in a hierarchical structure. Authoritarian behavior is condemned.

During his early ministry, Christ prepared the church's first leaders.

After Pentecost, these leaders organized ministry teams; they did not try to meet all needs themselves. Soon leadership responsibility shifted from the apostles to elders, and this pattern prevailed throughout the New Testament period. These spiritually mature men were not selected democratically but by discerning those whom God had called.

The elders' terms of office are not defined in Scripture, but there seems to be no need to change leaders as long as the elders grow spiritually. Commissioning these elders does not separate them as clergy from the laity. All God's people are servants of the new covenant and ministers of the Spirit.

Jesus taught that leaders are not characterized by ruling others. Instead, the leader seeks to bring others to a responsive relationship with Jesus Christ. It requires integrity and openness. Service to others is the Biblical test of genuine authority to lead in the church.

- Leadership is a function

New Testament descriptions suggest that leadership positions are related to activities, not to offices which must be filled. Only those who minister have authority, and that authority is found only in ministering. Believers should strive for excellency in Christian life and ministry, improving their gifts through serving. It is not unscriptural for disciples to aspire to leadership, provided their qualifications are in keeping with biblical guidelines.

- Leaders help others

In the New Testament we always read about multiple leadership in a church. A single leader is just not able to do the work adequately. Equipping others for ministry, then, is the most crucial leadership function for the building up of the body. Leaders should also be open to constant personal transformation while they search for the guidance of the Lord. They should stimulate growth, knowing that this will mean increased effectiveness.

Women, although they are recognized as active, gifted members of the church, do not seem encouraged in the New Testament to be elders. Men and women have equal access to God's grace, but this does not nullify differences in role functions.

- Applications

If we take the apostolic writings seriously, we have to depart from

the one-man performances in many of our churches. Church planters have to work with a team of gifted apprentices, training them for leadership. The pastor is a fellow believer whom God has blessed with gifts for serving the church.

Leaders need to keep their priorities straight. They must not get bogged down with activities beyond their calling. And while the actual structure of a leadership model can be flexible, we must adhere to the principle of spiritually qualified leaders who encourage and equip all believers for ministry.

### ***5. Principles of Internationalization in Mission (I)***

Harold Ens (U.S.)

- Foreign to whom?

For more than a century—beginning in Russia—Mennonite Brethren have been active in foreign mission. But the very term "foreign" brings the question, Foreign to whom? Jesus gave a command to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, and for North American Mennonite Brethren that came to mean some place outside of North America.

But Christendom is no longer existent, and the base for world mission is now found wherever there is a community of Christians. In 1984, the centennial celebration of our mission efforts gave dramatic proof of the international nature of our denomination. Worldwide membership today totals more than 160,000; only about forty-four thousand of these are in North America.

How does this affect our understanding of foreign mission? That understanding was based on the fact that most of our membership was in North America. Now that indigenous churches are found in more than a dozen countries around the world, how are we to respond to the Great Commission?

- Working as partners

In North American mission efforts, evangelization has always been a high priority. Planting believers' churches has been our primary goal. For several decades now we have entered into an interdependent partnership with other national conferences for new outreach and church growth in the

countries where these churches exist.

This concept of partnership has been refined over the years. Mission administrators discuss program, budget and vision with national leaders. These consultations help build bridges of understanding. But in the crucial areas of planning and resources, the initiative has usually come from North America. It is difficult to see this as true partnership.

Yet some positive experiences in evangelization have resulted from partnership. In India, Zaire, Panama and Brazil the church and mission have carried out successful and innovative programs. We must work to improve our partnership and we must move toward a more biblically responsible partnership. The mission must reduce its control more fully while looking for supportive, nondirective ways to stimulate maturity in the church.

- Beyond partnership to internationalization

Is partnership enough? How are the growing Two-Thirds World churches to respond obediently to Christ's command? These churches should also become sending churches. "Foreign" mission has become "world" mission. This movement toward a broader base for the missionary task has been defined by Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services as:

*(Internationalization means) multinational cooperation of Mennonite Brethren conferences for planning, organizing and carrying out world mission . . . . The ultimate . . . would be to form a missionary board structure with equitable representation from all countries that would be ready to cooperate.*

For some of us, such structural changes are overwhelming. Can we indeed relinquish the power base? But we must face the need for internationalization and work to implement it effectively. We must pray, plan and work together.

The missionary task is not complete. Mennonite Brethren churches from around the world call for new missionaries. A response to that call should not come only from North America. Does responsibility for the missionary enterprise lie with the whole Christian community or just with those who can afford personnel, training and technology? The question must be answered firmly. The mission of the Mennonite Brethren church is the responsibility of the whole Mennonite Brethren brotherhood. May this be

another step to a fuller understanding and implementation of internationalization.

## ***6. Principles of Internationalization in Mission (II)***

Nzash Lumeya (Zaire)

The call of the Mennonite Brethren to witness to the nations has resulted in an international family. The number of locations of Mennonite Brethren around the world is astonishing. I would like to share three major avenues to help the worldwide brotherhood build a cross-cultural mission network.

- Oneness in faith

The Old and New Testaments describe God's ultimate plan as an international restoration. A genuine faith in Yahweh/Christ qualifies a person to become one of God's people. In the pre-monarchy period in Israel's history, charismatic international figures like Caleb, Rahab, and Ruth helped the Israelites. Later, in the post-monarchy period, God's people became more aware of his agenda for the nations.

The New Testament saw the introduction of cross-cultural, international mission teams. While Antioch modelled this approach, Jerusalem was not ready to accept the oneness of Jews and Gentiles based on faith in Christ alone. Jewish culture was a prerequisite for redemption in their eyes. It took Peter's report on the repentance of Cornelius before the Jerusalem church had no further objection. Faith in Christ helped them accept Peter's involvement in this early internationalization.

Once unified, we labor together to build up the saints around the world. The internationalization of mission is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. He gathered a cross-cultural team in Antioch and ordered them to release Paul and Barnabas to communicate Christ cross-culturally. No wonder Paul learned to team up with many young international leaders. He teamed up with them on the basis of their common faith in Christ.

- Healthy structures

Currently, the world mission scene is controlled largely by Western leaders. Until this changes and the power of decision-making is shared with

non-Western leaders, the church will not be truly international.

We need to establish mutuality. Structures which may have been useful before World War 2 are now a stumbling block to fraternity and mutual participation in mission. Instead of a paternalistic model, is it possible to return to a biblical church-mission model?

The church must lead mission activities, not the other way around. The unilateral mission structure must be broken and replaced by a bi-lateral mission structure. Cross-cultural servants will become members of local churches where they serve. They may receive wages from abroad, but they will be members locally.

The present dichotomy between church and mission, where a church is sometimes under the direction of a mission fellowship, is contrary to the New Testament model. This relationship stifles both internationalization and indigenization. Mission models which allow mutuality will encourage churches to not only receive but also send cross-cultural servants.

Unity in faith must be expressed in structures. We must find new mission models rooted both at home and abroad. National conferences should relate to others through national boards, sharing joint mission projects. But we should never impose a model on a national church.

- Cultural sensitivity

When we create organizations or preach the gospel, we must demonstrate cultural sensitivity. Our spiritual ancestors critically read the Scriptures and applied the gospel to their situation. Today, Mennonite Brethren need to find local forms which express God's eternal truths in their culture. Let us free our worldwide brotherhood to the gospel in a language that is intelligible in their context.

## ***7. Mennonite Brethren Distinctives (I)***

John J. Klassen (Brazil)

- Historical antecedents

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, forbears of the Mennonites, were generally misunderstood and terribly persecuted for their distinctives. Among the tenets they defended, even at the cost of imprisonment

or death, were: a church of only the regenerated, separated from the state; an obedience to Scripture; a committed discipleship with the ethic of unrestricted love; and a missionary mandate for all believers. Since those turbulent times the Western world has become more tolerant of religious diversity. Some notions then considered strange are now accepted. However, it is fitting to review our distinctives to check if they are in harmony with God's design and if they do indeed order our lives.

- Recent summaries

Bernhard J. Braun, A.E. Janzen, and John A. Toews have each prepared summaries of Mennonite Brethren distinctives. All three include similar elements in their lists of distinctives: biblicism as the basis of theology and practice; Christian discipleship including non-resistance; regeneration as a transforming experience; and evangelism and mission as a task for every member.

At least two include eschatology, church purity, and emphasis on the brotherhood. Comparing these with the Anabaptist beliefs reveals many of the same principles, although adapted to a different context.

- Five basic distinctives

a. *Biblical.* Mennonite Brethren biblicism tends to be very practical, sometimes leaning toward simplicity and even legalism. In general, though, it has preserved the church from mere orthodoxy. The whole Bible is recognized as inspired, but the focus of Scriptural authority is recognized as being in the New Testament. Members need to collectively and individually study the Bible to make faith and practice conform to its teaching.

b. *Regenerate.* The church is composed of redeemed, truly converted people who identify themselves with Christ through baptism and covenant with other believers to participate in a local church. They have left the sinful course of the world, being converted by grace through faith. While imperfection and sin still exist, the church should strive for purity.

c. *Committed.* Salvation is a gift from God, but it calls for costly commitment. Christians must be prepared for spiritual warfare and for non-conformity to the standards of the world. This means abstaining from that which has the appearance of evil while walking in the Spirit and producing spiritual fruit. Jesus' teachings, including peacemaking and loving without



restrictions, must be taken seriously.

d. *Wholistic*. At certain times evangelism has neglected material needs. But for many years, in many places, Mennonite Brethren have recognized that the church must minister to the total needs of humanity without neglecting the proclamation of the gospel.

e. *Hope*. Mennonite Brethren emphasize the glorious expectation of Christ's return. Although there are different interpretations of this hope, it provides the stimulus for practical sanctification, for endurance in suffering, and for perseverance in evangelism.

These distinctives, though not exclusive to Mennonite Brethren nor universally accepted by them, provide a summary of what we believe to be essential. They reflect a desire to be sincere, obedient and thankful. But it is not enough to only affirm these distinctives; we must transform them into daily reality.

## **7. Mennonite Brethren Distinctives (II)**

J.B. Toews (U.S.)

- Distinctives rooted in sixteenth century Anabaptism

The Mennonite Brethren movement is deeply rooted in sixteenth century Anabaptism. The founders of the church did not propose a new understanding of Scriptures—they called for a renewal of life in consistent conformity with the Bible teachings as understood by their Anabaptist forbears. We must again ask the question, Do we live what we profess to believe? To examine ourselves, we must look at five areas of Mennonite Brethren understanding of faith and life according to the Scriptures.

- Commitment to Holy Scriptures

Mennonite Brethren "believe that all Scripture is inspired by God . . .," infallible and authoritative (*Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith*). The community of born-again believers is to seek daily nurture from the Scriptures. To understand biblical teaching in specific issues, Mennonite Brethren seek to follow the principle of a community hermeneutic, studying the Holy Word with prayer and depending on the Holy Spirit for illumination. "What does the Bible say?" has been a continuous point of reference in

Mennonite Brethren history.

- Emphasis on the new birth

The Mennonite Brethren movement was born out of an environment where Mennonite lineage was a condition for church membership. Many were only nominal Christians, never having had a conversion experience. Deteriorating morality and ethics encouraged the secession (P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 230-232).

The Mennonite Brethren founders recognized human sinfulness and believed that salvation is by grace through faith. This involves trust, obedience and surrender to Christ. True believers take on a new lifestyle and confirm their commitment by baptism.

- A fellowship of true believers

Regeneration is historically inseparable from ecclesiology for Mennonite Brethren. The central issue leading to the birth of the new church was a desire to return to the true character of a New Testament church. Church founders rejected an inclusive church of all people, recognizing this as unscriptural (Friesen, 230-232).

In addition, the body of Christ is not a mere organization but an interdependent fellowship in which members practice encouragement and constructive discipline.

Historically, Mennonite Brethren have believed in a plurality of leadership. This has been in tension with the trend toward individualism in western culture.

- In the world but not of the world

The church's background accounts for the Mennonite Brethren concern for a consistent theology of life. We do not want a separation from the people of the world but from lifestyles and values that dominate the lives of worldly people. Mennonite Brethren records indicate a continuing struggle with questions of consistency in life.

This attempt to harmonize belief and life is part of an understanding of the kingdom of God. Another element of this understanding is the ongoing conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

- A missionary movement

The emphasis on the need for a personal salvation experience provides the basis for a worldview which recognizes only two kinds of people: those who are "saved" and those who are "unsaved." The redeemed community is responsible to witness to the unsaved. Being the church and evangelizing are interdependent elements, if not identical.

- Implications

These five elements constitute the center of Mennonite Brethren confession. The church's history bears testimony to the struggle for consistency between profession and practice. Honest evaluation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit must tell us whether we are what our profession calls us to be.

## ***8. Learning From Other Mission Strategies (I)***

Peter M. Hamm (Canada)

- What are the strategies of Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services?

*Evangelism and church planting* is given high priority, with emphasis on urban centers and on unreached peoples in areas where we presently have work. *Leadership training* and nurture ministries also are very important. In some countries this becomes our primary task because the national church does most of the evangelizing. *Ministering to human needs* is a vital part of our wholistic understanding of the gospel. Proclamation is balanced with social, medical and development ministries and with the peace witness. *Partnerships* with national conferences are being developed. This includes present steps in internationalization and the move toward regional planning. *Support for mission ministries* continues to be necessary, cooperating in things like Bible translation and radio ministries.

- Other mission strategies

a. *Exclusively Evangelism.* Some agencies focus exclusively on evangelism. Campus Crusade for Christ International, for instance, has a three-fold strategy of winning, building, and sending. It cooperates with all denominations.

The strength of this approach is its deliberate focus on personal

evangelism and its emphasis on a Spirit-filled life. The weakness is its mechanistic manner of confronting persons with the "four spiritual laws" and prematurely urging a decision. The danger is evangelism without church planting.

*b. Predominantly Nurture.* Several large denominational missions have, by default, become known as maintenance ministries. Frequently, such missions are under the direction and control of the national church. While it is good not to abandon a newly-established group of believers, we must guard against developing dependency and establishing institutions which are too big for the church to maintain independently. If most funds go to institutions, the mission may have lost sight of its mandate to share the gospel.

*c. Social ministry.* Some agencies are primarily concerned with helping the church in social, economic or developmental tasks. This finds ample biblical support, especially when the same churches have other arms for church planting and nurture. The strategy is questionable when its principal goal is social or political change and when it encourages a non-biblical theology or a violent methodology. While liberation theologians may sensitize us, we must keep Christ at the center of redemption.

*d. Christian presence.* In some countries, the political climate will only allow mission by presence—the Christian presence authenticates the witness. Although this approach is frequently thought to be cowardly and weak, it is actually very demanding and in some countries is the only possible approach.

*e. Cooperating with the state church.* As a result of unfruitful church planting efforts in some areas where there are dominant state churches, some evangelicals have concluded that we should not plant churches but instead work for renewal. This is an optimistic strategy that encourages the evangelical remnant while working for Christian unity. But will new believers find nurture if the pastor lacks spiritual life? What about those who have left the church entirely? Is there not a legitimate sectarian viability, as modelled by sixteenth century Anabaptists?

• Supporting national workers

Several mission agencies send funds to independent ministries which are said to be more effective while costing much less money. But if

affluent North Americans are content to do mission by proxy, interest could soon wane. Mission would remain alien. And such support could create a new dependency.

- Encouraging emerging missions

Many largely indigenous mission agencies are emerging around the world. Today there are twenty thousand non-Western missionaries, but this number is increasing rapidly. Indigenous missions and Western missions need each other to develop better training programs, support bases, structures, and overall fruitfulness. While guarding against paternalism, the Western church must not see this trend as releasing the West from its own missionary responsibility.

May God grant us a teachable spirit and perceptive understanding so we can learn the lessons which will make us more productive in extending the kingdom.

## ***9. The Role of Baptism and Church Membership (I)***

Dietrich Reimer (Brazil)

- Baptism based on the Bible

From the very beginning, Mennonite Brethren have tried to be a church based on the teachings of the New Testament. As a result of their biblical understanding, baptism has been for those who give a clear testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. The church is for the converted.

The church's mission is also clearly defined. God, through his Son and the Holy Spirit, provides the gospel of good news and the power to carry this gospel to all people. The church is to witness, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach.

- Baptism in Mennonite Brethren churches

The biblical record makes it clear that baptism is a commandment of Jesus Christ. Mennonite Brethren churches have never doubted this. It is also clear that baptism is restricted to those who have declared their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Upon demonstration of an authentic, sanctified life, a person may confess Christ as Lord and receive baptism. We do not believe it biblically justifiable to establish a minimum age or a fixed term of proba-

tion before someone may be baptized. However, criteria for evaluating faith are based more on cultural norms than on New Testament teaching. The rite itself has sometimes become more important than the truths which it symbolizes. We should re-think this in our doctrine and practice.

What does the New Testament say about the meaning of baptism? Baptism is a commandment of Jesus Christ. It is a public testimony that Jesus Christ is Savior, and it is a public commitment to live a new life. Baptism is an external symbol of the internal new birth. It marks true disciples. Believers are visibly incorporated into the church through baptism.

In view of this significance, let me suggest some questions which should be considered: How can we eliminate legalism in baptism? How can we emphasize that baptism is a privilege rather than an obligation or initiation? Could baptism be practiced by individual Christians who will then lead the new convert to the church?

#### • Church Membership

In general, membership requires salvation and baptism, a sanctified life, assumption of moral standards approved by the church, regular participation in the church, regular contribution to the church's needs, a right to participate in the Lord's Supper and administrative meetings, and a right to receive spiritual assistance from the church.

Mennonite Brethren churches have tried to help members live lives worthy of the gospel. But there have been some abuses. Zeal has sometimes been confused with legalism. Attempts have been made to control members' lives. And sometimes conversion has been made synonymous with literal separation from the world.

Membership is an exceptional privilege and a sacred, permanent responsibility. It means being chosen by God for ministry. It means living in a community where Christ's love links us in unity and where we have the privilege of bearing the gospel to all people. Church members can show the world how to live a happy, fulfilled life. We are to be salt and light in the world, not limiting our ministry to within the church. The church exists in the world to be a restoring agency—a glorifying agency of God. We need to ask ourselves how we can improve our concept of membership, how we can give members a right vision of their proper place, and how to determine what

the universal characteristics of membership are, without ethnic, political or other considerations.

## ***10. The Role of Baptism and Church Membership (II)***

Kilabi Bululu (Zaire)

- Baptism's origins in Zaire

Baptism has been important since the arrival of Mennonite Brethren missionaries in Zaire. Catholic missionaries had already introduced the custom, and Zairians considered it an activity which accompanied the spread of Western civilization. It was something Zairians wanted to participate in.

When the early Mennonite Brethren began to preach, masses hurried to hear the gospel. They were converted and immediately baptized. In contrast to the established practice, baptism became something based on a faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer.

An important part of baptism in Zaire was the taking of a new name. For Zairians, it was important that the name inscribed on the baptismal register was not the name they were born with.

Baptism's social influence extended into the political realm. The Belgian government created an elite class of those who had cut their ties with pagan practice. They were called *d'Evolue* (the Evolved), and among other privileges they were exempted from the jurisdiction of tribal courts. The heavy burden of ancestral laws was lifted by baptism.

Marriage was also affected. Christians realized that if they served one God and were baptized in one Spirit, they should be able to marry a person from another ethnic group.

- Required conditions for church membership

Before baptism, the adult applicant must acknowledge Christ as Savior, spend one or two years in a Bible study organized for baptismal candidates, and support the work of the church financially.

After baptism, each person must agree to follow the regulations of the church. These include practicing hospitality, attending church services regularly, giving faithfully, marrying in the church (and for life), and agreeing not to take disputes with other Christians to civil courts.

- Implications of baptism and membership

Pastors follow the principles established by the missionaries, but they are very strict in the area of finances. No one can take communion if he or she has not paid dues. The day of the baptismal ceremony is declared a holiday. Members stay up all night, and a banquet is organized. This day is very important in the church's history—even the angels in heaven rejoice.

Church members visit each other regularly. Once a week, the women visit one or more families to study the Bible and eat together. During the visit they take an offering and leave it with the family. We believe we must hold to the brotherhood of the members, and visits are one way to do this.

The Mennonite Brethren founded a Bible school in 1935. Since then, many other churches have sent their students to this school. As a result, it is difficult to find any difference between a baptismal service organized by the Mennonite Brethren and one organized by the Baptist churches of the region.

The influence of the baptismal ceremony and the strong fellowship of the church members contribute significantly to the development of new churches.

## ***11. The Role of Baptism and Church Membership (III)***

V.K. Rufus (India)

When Mennonite Brethren missionaries brought the gospel to India they taught biblical doctrines according to their belief. The Indian Mennonite Brethren Church still holds to these doctrines, but I believe the church needs to rethink its idea of baptism, church ministry, and church membership.

- Baptism in the Indian Mennonite Brethren Church

In order to be baptized, the church believes that a person must accept Christ and profess him publicly. The person must confess and forsake sin openly, seeking forgiveness. Some pastors, however, have departed from these accepted standards and have set their own criteria. As a result many people have been baptized without experiencing the new birth.

Theologically, the church does not believe that the act of baptism



removes sins. Baptism is only a sign, but it is a witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a public testimony acknowledging Jesus as Savior. Mature adults who are born again and strong in their faith may be baptized.

As for the mode of baptism, the Indian Mennonite Brethren Church believes that baptism should be by immersion only. The church does not accept people into membership if they were baptized in any other way.

Sometimes baptism has been misused. People have been baptized for the sake of marriage, with no sign of repentance. Some have been baptized just before church elections; some have been baptized because it was a requirement for employment in church institutions. Others have been baptized to get scholarships for further education. Some just wanted to become church members, while others wanted to receive a new name. But in spite of these wrongful practices, baptism is considered an important doctrine and a happy occasion.

#### • Church membership

In order to qualify for church membership, a person must accept Christ as Savior and live a committed life. He or she must confess sin publicly, and be baptized. The person can then join the church in one of four ways: professing faith and being baptized; transferring from a sister church; relating one's salvation experience to the elders, or confessing sin and asking for forgiveness, if it is a member who was excluded from fellowship.

Membership is a privilege. Regular members are those who live near the church; non-residential members are those who have moved away for employment or other reasons. In some churches they are associate members. Membership is only terminated when the person dies or is excommunicated by decision of the church and conference.

Presently the church follows the established practice of accepting a person into membership on the day of baptism. But what does this person know about the responsibilities and meaning of church membership? I feel there must be a waiting period. Training classes should be held to give the believer a clear understanding of what happens when he or she is accepted into membership. Then new members will work with much enthusiasm, and many evils will be avoided.

If the church follows this suggestion, many baptized people will not

take initiative to join the church because there will be some difficulties. The pastor who baptizes them may not return to their village immediately to hold the classes. This would leave the new believers confused. The church must work out a realistic method to make new believers true disciples of Christ and true members of the church. Presently many members do not know the real meaning of membership. When they do they can have true fellowship and will be able to support the various ministries of the church.

## ***12. The Role of Women in the Church (I)***

Harry Janzen (Brazil)

- Women in New Testament times

The women's liberation movement has contributed to growing interest in this subject, but the issue is not new. Male-centeredness was a reality in Old Testament times. There was a double moral standard and a different set of expectations for women. However, a woman's role did have some positive aspects. As a homemaker and mother, she was revered. And in the religious sphere women enjoyed greater freedom than in any other area of life. Worship roles were different, but women were not considered inferior.

At the time of the church's origin, all social structures were patriarchal. Greek society had established a woman's position as generally subordinate to that of a man, but in Roman society there was more progress. In many respects the Roman wife was considered equal to her husband.

- The role of women for Jesus, Paul, and the early church

Two significant factors provide a background for this discussion. First, the creation account indicates that men and women have equal value before God. Second, Paul makes it clear that when it comes to salvation there is no distinction between men and women (Gal. 3:28).

When Jesus visited the home of Lazarus he spent time teaching Mary. In doing so he departed from rabbinic tradition, for rabbis refused to teach women. Jesus also raised the level of women when he demanded a single standard for both the man and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and when he talked with the Samaritan woman (John 4). Women were the first to proclaim his resurrection.

Paul's key statement that "there is . . . neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28) makes it clear that in union with Christ there is no value distinction, although personality is not eliminated. In other passages (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 13) Paul indicates that women received the spiritual capacity for ministry. In greeting the church at Rome, Paul refers to the important work of various women. In Phil. 4:2-3 Paul refers to two women who "labored side by side with me in the gospel...." At the least, that would involve teaching; it may have included preaching.

One difficulty remains. In 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15, Paul orders women to remain silent in the church. Yet in 1 Cor. 11:5 Paul apparently considers it normal for women to pray and prophesy in public. Perhaps the restrictions apply to women who interrupted the worship service to ask questions, and in those situations it was better to remain silent.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter says that the prophecy of Joel has been fulfilled. This includes the fact that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2). Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). And in Acts 18, Priscilla assumes leadership with her husband in instructing Apollos.

- The contemporary church and women

I am not advocating the women's liberation movement, nor do I plead for the ordination of women. But I wish to look at this issue with the whole Scripture in mind, not just a few isolated texts—even if they are emphatic.

What impressions do we give our children if women are the main teachers during the early Sunday school years and men are the only teachers for the adult classes? How can we justify one type of behavior on the mission field, where women teach and preach, and demand restrictions at home?

Are we not restricting the Holy Spirit by impeding women from serving freely in certain ministries? If God ordained a certain order in marriage, that may provide orientation for us. But that does not justify male chauvinism nor does it allow men to legislate as they wish regarding women's ministries. Nor can we set boundaries where the Scriptures do not delineate restrictions. May the Lord enlighten us.

## ***12. The Role of Women in the Church (II)***

Marlene Enns (Paraguay)

Since the larger picture has been presented, let me examine the two main problem texts more closely.

- 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

The women addressed here were married women. They misinterpreted their new-found freedom in Christ. Other references (1 Cor 7:3-5, 10-16; and 1 Cor. 11) indicate that women in the Corinthian church were disrupting their marriage relationships at home as well as disrupting church services.

As a result, they are told not to speak. What does this mean? Paul has just said that women pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) and that all prophesy and convict (1 Cor. 14:24), but that if a woman has questions she is to ask her husband at home. The context clarifies that "not speaking" stands in contrast to asking questions, not to prophesying, teaching, or other forms of participation.

This is understandable, since at that time girls learned by asking their parents or brothers questions. Paul tells women not versed in Christian truth to ask questions at home rather than denying others the chance to worship without interruption.

Paul also tells the women to "keep silent." The same is asked of those who speak in tongues without interpreters (1 Cor. 14:28) and of prophets waiting their turn to speak (1 Cor. 14:30). The silence is temporal and functional, not absolute. Women are also told to learn (1 Cor. 14:35), a contrast to rabbinical thinking which held that teaching a woman the Torah was like teaching her to sin.

- 1 Timothy 2:9-15

*Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with*

*proper clothing, modestly, discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children, if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*

The women addressed here live in a time of heretical teaching. Women of that time were quite untaught, but it seems that some had exercised gifts of teaching. That combination could easily lead to heretical teaching, and it was safer if they did not teach.

They were married women, as indicated by the context. And they disrupted the marriage relationship. The verb for "exercise authority" may be translated "domineer, thrust oneself forward sexually." They may have been following a societal pattern in which female teachers were also courtesans. Chrysostom seems to have understood the text this way in the fourth century.

Given the situation in Ephesus, women were not to teach nor to exercise authority over a man. What does this mean? Paul seems to explain himself with the contrasting instruction "remain quiet" (*hesuchia*). This word does not mean "silent." For example, after Peter explained Cornelius' experience the Jewish brothers became "quiet" and "praised" God (Acts 11:18). In Caesarea, the disciples were "quiet" and "said," "The will of the Lord be done." "Quiet" seems to mean not raising strife and opposition.

The women are also told to be submissive, as the male prophets are (1 Cor. 14:30-32) and as all members are to be "to everyone who helps in the work" (1 Cor. 16:16).

Paul's injunctions do not deal with the exercise of gifts or the question of office, but with a lack of decorum which disrupts worship and marriage. These guidelines should cause us to structure our worship for mutual edification (I Cor. 14), to rethink the priority of character and marital relation-

ship for women and men who are in ministry, and to recognize more fully the contributions of single men and women.

### ***13. The Role of Women in the Church (III)***

Edith Neufeld (Paraguay)

We do not all perceive the seriousness of this issue equally, since we come from such a diverse range of backgrounds and cultural expectations. Because we have not yet developed a consistent biblical position on this question, some may want to ignore it. Some find it tiresome. Others will continue focusing energy and thought on it.

The main question to deal with is this: Are we concerned about giving women access to all church ministry positions, or will we stand up for the God-given role of women—a role which responds to the calling of the body of Christ in our world full of danger and suffering?

- The calling, the danger, the role

As Christians, we are to respond first to the divine *calling* as members of one body, the body of Christ. If we are part of the body, we are united not only to the head but also to all other members. For Paul, this means there should be a responsible individuality based on interdependence. Just as Christ was willing to die in order to bring life, the church is called to die to itself in order to receive life.

Christ calls us to follow his example. Should we not try harder to follow this call with joyful obedience? As we grow into the fullness of Christ, he will be honored before all nations and the issue of women's roles may disappear.

A strong call for equality in ministry and women's causes carries *danger*. The movement began with intellectuals, and extreme ideas filtered into the thinking of a wide audience. All natural roles became antiquated, scandalous and unwanted. Many women have one explanation for their desire for liberation: self-realization. From here it is a short path to more extreme ideas like man-hatred, defamation of God the Father as a patriarchal authority, and the abolition of all Christian and moral values. All human roles would become interchangeable, and a new society would be created.

## ***14. The Priority of Evangelism in the Church's Mission (I)***

Alvo Waldow (Brazil)

- Born of God, Essence of Christ, Reason for the Holy Spirit

God created human beings perfect and intelligent for his glory. But God's creation chose to disobey and sin. The image of God in which men and women are created was stained. People became empty. Efforts to find a human solution to the problem only increased the distance between themselves and God.

So they opted for another master—Satan. We see the results in hate, bitterness, illness, desperation, and more. It was God himself who formed a plan for reconciliation. Abram was the first link in this plan (Gen. 3:15,21; 4:3-5), starting a process which eventually led to the birth of Christ.

The essence of Jesus Christ is to give. He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Jesus placed priority on giving new life through evangelism (Isa. 53:2-12; Luke 4:18; John 3:17; 1 Tim. 1:15).

This redemptive work was consummated when Jesus gave his life on the cross and rose from the dead. But this gift cannot be accepted without assistance, therefore Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is to work redemptively within human hearts, integrating them into the body of Christ and giving power to testify (John 14:16-26; 16:7-14). The Spirit also applies the victory of Christ to defeat evil spirits.

Jesus said the world would recognize his followers by their unity. The Holy Spirit pours out this uniting love, making known what was given to us so that we might evangelize. Nothing is impossible to those who believe in the Spirit's power.

- The church's reason for existence

If the church did not have a mission, God would take Christians to himself immediately after conversion. But he leaves them to unmask the deception of Satan; Satan's captives must be liberated. Renewed in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), Christians are able to do heroic deeds through obedience.

There are no sterile sheep in the body of Christ. Jesus chose intel-

ligent sheep. He gives wisdom and power, and all are called to produce disciples. But we have to believe; then we can do the same things Christ did—and even greater things. If a member is not evangelizing, he or she is disobedient and therefore sinning. If evangelism does not bring results, the member may be relying on personal strength rather than on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps more creativity is needed.

- The character of an evangelizing church

As a church, we need to realize that meeting rooms and buildings are not the church. We are the church. If we think of buildings when we think of "church," we will not be an evangelizing church. We must be creative, as Jesus was in using mud and water—or whatever he had available—to teach and heal. Our creativity will be needed in all areas of our world, for we cannot think of one part of our lives as sacred and another part as secular or profane.

An evangelizing church has other important features. Members are filled with the Holy Spirit and participate actively. The church discipless its members and equips them for service, since discipleship is a part of evangelism. The evangelizing church should grow by 100 percent each year.

Church members should have a Christ-centered lifestyle, serving one another in love. Leaders are chosen by God and accepted by the body. If a church has doctrinal or denominational problems, it should examine itself to see if its doctrines or traditions are hindering the Word of God.

A loving church celebrates its intimacy with all generations and interests. It must give freely of its resources, not depending on outside assistance. And it must not be afraid of the great work the Holy Spirit will do in the church. If we want to obey God and be worthy of Christ, we must make evangelism our highest priority.

## ***15. The Priority of Evangelism in the Church's Mission (II)***

Albert Enns (Paraguay)

- The battle for priority

There are several basic mission strategies:

a. *Serving Christ*, doing good deeds, and alleviating suffering



without placing primary importance on converting people or starting churches.

*b. Witnessing in word and deed.* Little effort is made to plant churches or convert people, nor are people invited to make this decision.

*c. Striving for a worldwide brotherhood and world unity.* Social justice becomes a way to produce equality and give people access to life's good things.

But many believe with us that evangelism is a greater responsibility of the church. Evangelism includes saving souls and establishing self-supporting churches under the lordship of Christ.

These theories result in several mission philosophies:

*The Pauline Philosophy:* winning souls and establishing churches. Missionaries are not sent out to do miracles but to preach the gospel.

*The Parallel Philosophy:* mission is obligated to serve the wide spectrum of human needs, with all aspects having equal value.

*The Temporal/Eternal Philosophy:* the goal is that the gospel is accepted, but in the meantime other goals may have equal status. They are combined according to the example of Jesus, who attended to both but gave the eternal elements priority.

All three philosophies have priorities. Personally, I hold to the Pauline and object to the Parallel, based on New Testament teaching. The third is acceptable as long as it does not deviate into the second.

This discussion has a long history. The issue was raised in eleven world mission conferences between 1860 and 1973. Gradually, the general consensus that evangelism should be the church's chief concern wore away. Even evangelicals began to disagree.

#### • Reasons for the priority of evangelism

*a. Jesus and the Great Commission.* When Jesus sent his followers out into the world, his instructions reflected a greater concern for the spiritual. As Jesus was sent to earth for the salvation of souls (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:15), we also are sent (John 20:21). The Great Commission which reflects this command is related in all four gospels and in the book of Acts. For those who look to the Bible to guide their mission, this has far-reaching implications.

Significantly, the Great Commission is given after the work of

redemption has been completed. Before Calvary, the answer to the question, What must I do to inherit eternal life? was given in the Great Commandment and in the teaching to do good works. After Calvary the answer is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Acts 16:31).

*b. Understanding the deepest need.* Sin is the most serious disease affecting human beings, and all other problems stem from sin. The solution must be found in the root—eradicating sin—and not in dealing with symptoms like injustice, poverty, and hunger. These other problems can only be solved after evangelism has been done. A better world will only be produced by creating regenerated people.

The apostles, the early church, and, until recently, most Christians have understood the priority of evangelism. For the early Christians it was clear that Jesus was the only salvation. They knew, as Jesus did, that a soul has greater value than the whole world (Matt. 16:28).

*c. Evangelism makes the devil uneasy.* Satan was more perturbed at the death of Christ than at all his good deeds. Things have not changed. There is more objection to evangelism than to any other work of the church. Why? Because evangelism is concerned with the most important issue: winning people for Christ.

## ***16. Music in Mission Strategy (I)***

Clarence Hiebert (U.S.)

### **• Communicating through music**

Music, like language, conveys a message and can be a significant conveyor of the Christian faith. Communicating accurately through music is not simply a matter of having theologically correct words. Context is also significant. Like a foreign language, music may not be useful in communicating the Christian message unless it is used appropriately.

This understanding is important for missionaries who enter new settings. They cannot assume that their own experience will be meaningful in the new situation; instead, missionaries will have to learn the new musical language around them and be catalysts in encouraging Christian music to emerge from these forms.

It is important to realize that the significance and function of music is measured by its ability to communicate in a specific culture. Some musical elements—rhythm or tempo, for example—may draw similar physical responses in many cultures. Musical traditions and specific structural techniques in writing music will vary widely.

- Music and the Word of God

The praise of God is the dominant theme and function of music-making in the Bible. A broad range of feelings is expressed, including despair, joy, anxiety, frustration, hope, and many more. In the New Testament, the early church is characterized as a group always ready to sing (1 Cor. 14:15-16). This is in sharp contrast to unbelievers, who are described as sad, despairing people. Although the form of music is not clearly outlined, God clearly desires that music express faith, worship, and a new worldview.

Paul expresses thoughts on worship as well: "I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (1 Cor. 14:25). There should be a balance between thought and feeling in music and worship.

- Music in mission

Recent emphases on the need for indigeneity in music reveal that there has been little awareness of how foreign Western hymns and gospel songs seem to other cultures. While it is natural for missionaries to enjoy their own music, it should not be superimposed on those to whom they minister.

Instead, it should be clearly explained that God desires sincere and authentic worship in the languages and ways that are unique to each culture. How does this happen?

The most fertile ground for developing meaningful, indigenous hymnody is the existing music of a culture. Contextualization is demanding, but it is worth the effort.

First, the music must be analyzed from a biblical standpoint. The task of gathering and critically analyzing all traditional and popular music should be undertaken by church leadership and missionaries. Their goal is to assess the meanings associated with the music-making. What is used? When? How? What feelings, attitudes or behaviors are stimulated by each type of music?

Studying the meaning and use of music in Christian ways calls for

research on the functional use of music in the Bible. Believers must allow God's Word to shape their choices.

Once these steps have been taken, indigenous musical styles with the potential to carry sacred messages appropriately can be chosen. Indigenous believers should make these decisions. Songs which inspire praise to God and are widely accepted will bring greater unity to the body of Christ.

Music is not a static thing. Decisions made by the indigenous church should be honored. The Holy Spirit will guide and bring any corrections as they are needed.

## ***17. Music in Mission Strategy (II)***

Robert Lay (Brazil)

- **Musical components**

Music is a powerful vehicle for evangelism. It makes people sensitive to consider and receive the message of God. God knows music is a good way to reveal himself.

As an efficient, universal language, music involves a communicator and a recipient. The message may be transmitted through emotional responses, through the mind, or through the body. It can be subjective (through melody, harmony, or rhythm) or objective (through the text or words).

- **Music in the Bible**

Christian music finds its origin with Abraham, who moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to a new country. No matter what the music of that time was like, Abraham surely did not leave all his customs behind. Likely the music at the new location reflected the former style but with a new content and message rooted in the promises of God.

After Canaan and Egypt, the desert years produced very specific instructions and rites. Moses, David, Solomon, and others institutionalized music with other parts of worship. When hearts were in tune with God, the worship was pleasing; when form overrode content, God denounced the ritualism.

In the New Testament the church of Acts grew in favor because its music and praise was transmitted in an understandable language.

- Music and the church

Our imperative is to proclaim the gospel in context, without accepting either syncretism or worldliness. God's revelation was given in the appropriate cultural context, and music likewise should adapt as a dynamic language. Music from other cultures should be appreciated, but it should also be contextualized. We need to identify ourselves with those to whom we wish to transmit the gospel. Since the principal goal of the church is to evangelize, music should contribute to this. We need to ask whether our music is helping to win souls.

Adoration and evangelism go together; that is why Satan seeks to create havoc in this area. Many church leaders have fallen into the snare of allowing music to become a divisive issue. Some will argue about the nature of music which comes from God and condemn popular forms of music or evangelism. It is sad to see this polarization and mutual recrimination, since Jesus asked the Father that all might be one so the world would believe (John 17:21). The musical form is not the primary goal; more important is our adoration and praise.

In Brazil, Christian authors, composers and musicians face a challenge. I believe we should use all means possible, including indigenous music, to transmit the gospel—culture is not necessarily a demonic creation. Ideas regarding music and rhythm which have no biblical basis should be corrected so that we do not hinder Christian musicians from doing their best for the Lord.

We need to support our musicians, eradicating the idea that they should "leave the world" after conversion. They need to help provide musical answers to the society in which they live. They must be careful to do all for the glory of God, but within their own context. We must believe that the Lord will sustain and keep musicians from evil.

- Several suggestions

Before imposing a song book, know the culture. Study local music, art and folklore. Adapt your musical heritage to the current scene. Don't classify other cultures as demonic without profound study. And stimulate new converts in other cultures to compose songs according to their own style.

## ***18. Dealing Biblically and Pastorally With the Divorced and Remarried (I)***

Herbert J. Brandt (Canada)

- Acceptance, restored confidence, recovered hope

The church can minister to the divorced and remarried while maintaining biblical integrity. Although their lives contradict what we claim is sacred in marriage, we will not help them by insisting on theological correctness. Nor can we ignore them or refuse those who seek fellowship in our congregations. They need intensive care; they must be dealt with redemptively.

At the outset it is important to understand that we have agreed that divorce is always wrong, and remarriage is permissible under certain circumstances. We have agreed that all sin can be forgiven. We have not agreed on the extent to which divorced people can serve in our churches.

It is of prime importance that we accept the divorced and remarried as people, and that we do not tie acceptance to repentance. Usually they are paralyzed by shame and long for healing. Accepting them does not mean we condone their actions, but it will pave the way for redemptive ministry and repentance.

Once we have accepted them, we as the church can deal pastorally to restore their confidence. God will accept them in spite of what has happened in their lives. To do this, we use the words of Scripture, and we use our openness and body language.

The divorced and remarried need hope. To condemn them without hope conflicts with our Lord's compassion. Although divorce is always wrong—and these people would normally readily agree—marriage failure can be forgiven.

- Confronting reality, confessing sin, restoring to service

Only when self-confidence and hope have been restored to them are they ready for confrontation. It must be handled sensitively, but sin must be repented of. Some people will rebel at confrontation; some will slip into despair. But if we are Spirit-led, the resulting sin consciousness will bring repentance and lead to healing.

True repentance opens the way to confession of sin. Sensitivity on

the part of the pastor/counselor is crucial. The goal is to bring forgiveness so the person can be freed from guilt and rebuild his or her life.

If we lead people to repentance and confession without leading them to worship and service, we set them up for disappointment and possible relapse. We have much to learn in this area. Theologically we have settled the question of consequences, but we still debate about the extent to which a divorced and remarried person can serve.

To say that the Scripture, "the husband of one wife," applies to the divorced and remarried negates the force and intent of divorce. A divorced man has no wife. We are not justified in limiting ministry based on this text.

Pastoral care and discipline requires us to be bold in grace and forgiveness. Restoration requires discipline, but much of our discipline is narrowly punitive rather than redemptive. The sins of divorce and remarriage should not stand in isolation when we practice discipline, but should be practiced as in the case of other offences. Restricting the person from serving in leadership or ministry may be appropriate in certain cases, but it should not be a principle.

- Preventative pastoral care

Statistics indicate that second marriages require a high degree of support to survive. The church must accept this challenge and provide preventative pastoral care. Part of this is teaching with conviction that marriage is permanent. Biblical standards cannot be relaxed despite society's relaxed attitudes in this area. The church must also be more sensitive to those who are experiencing marital problems. And singleness must be offered as an acceptable marital status.

The issue of divorce and remarriage is more practical than it is theoretical or even theological. We can no longer stand our ground on theological correctness and fail miserably on pastoral care. We are responsible to reach out to those whose only hope is Jesus Christ. By God's grace we will tackle this.

## ***19. Dealing Biblically and Pastorally With the Divorced and Remarried (II)***

Sinecio Lezcano (Paraguay)

### **• What the Bible says**

The Bible, our only guide for faith and conduct, tells us that God intends marriage to be indissoluble. A divorce, then, indicates that there has been a rupture in the relationship with God. But it is also clear that since the beginning men and women have been unable to keep firmly within the precepts of God.

The divorce discussion in Deut. 24:1-4 indicates that divorce was tolerated but not encouraged. Divorce was a difficulty which existed, but toleration was not a healthy solution. The letter of divorce was essential to prevent a wave of uncontrolled divorce. We do not know what reasons may have been considered valid for divorce. Adultery could not have been a reason, since an adulterer was to be killed and the remaining spouse could then remarry.

Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to clarify its meaning. He indicated that although Moses tolerated divorce, divorce was certainly not the will of the Lord. Jesus indicated that the only valid reason for divorce is adultery. A man who divorces his wife is to blame for her sexual promiscuity after the divorce, and one who marries a divorcee commits adultery. Christ reduces the severity of adultery's penalty from death to divorce, but divorce is only an option, not an obligation.

Paul (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-15) does not contradict Christ, although he does not mention the exception for adultery. He does, however, say that divorce is permissible when an unbeliever abandons the believing spouse. Remarriage is not addressed, so the church must exercise discernment.

### **• The church's role**

The church has a message for society and an answer to human need. One of its responsibilities is to explain what the Bible teaches about divorce so that all age groups will understand their responsibility to form a home.

The church should not reject any who come to church looking for



spiritual hope. This would contradict the church's purpose. But can the divorced and remarried be accepted as members? The usual compromise is to accept them without allowing them to practice leadership, setting up two classes of members—an undesirable situation according to the New Testament.

The church must be clear that divorce is not permitted except for the two cases noted above. Even then divorce is optional. Pastoral care should be given to those who have experienced divorce, helping them gain acceptance, love and forgiveness.

- Divorce in Paraguay

Paraguayan law permits marital dissolution for the division of material goods, but it does not permit remarriage. Remarriage would be considered bigamy, which is a serious crime. Instead, people take concubines, living together as though they were married. After five years, they gain the same rights as married couples in regard to property. Legally though, the law still considers them married to the first spouse. Legal divorce does not exist.

The practice, though, is different. People can simply cross into a neighboring country, remarry and return to Paraguay without any problem. Others do not bother remarrying. They simply live together without any objection from society, religion, or their own conscience.

As our church has grown, we have faced a dilemma. Divorced people respond to the salvation message, bringing with them a past which cannot be undone. Although they repent of their sin, they cannot escape its consequences. The church is faced with serious questions. Can a union which fulfills biblical expectations be considered a marriage, even when it does not conform to civil law? If the church rejects these people, does it contradict God's grace? For those with children, can the church counsel separation? Can divorce be considered a sin different from any other?

Each case will have to be looked at individually. The church must examine the cause and length of the separation, the spiritual condition at the present time and at separation, and the present situation. The church must use its resources for the good of the work and the affected lives. We cannot do less because the Lord expects no less.

## ***20. Dimensions of Social Responsibility in the Mission of the Church (I)***

P.B. Arnold (India)

- The commission

The basic mission of the church has always been the same: to liberate men and women totally as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. He demonstrated that evangelism and social action are inseparable sides of mission. Since we are called to continue the work of Christ, the church's primary goal is to mobilize God's people to make God's presence and love experienced by all.

The church's pressing task, then, is to promote human rights as an essential part of evangelism - not subordinate. This involves a ministry of sustenance to the faithful and a ministry of outreach to those who do not yet believe.

While this mandate means that the church needs to make people aware of injustices, the church must be careful not to identify itself unequivocally with each new social reform movement. Movements must be examined carefully. But the church which remains silent, doing nothing, commits the greatest collective sin.

Giving—not just financially but also sharing our very joy—is an essential part of the process. Jesus modelled this by showing the true nature of love: love was, and is, giving life to others, especially to the helpless. We are to raise each person to his or her fullest potential as creatures made in God's image, regardless of race or social status.

- The mission

The gospel brought new hope to many when it was first preached in India, particularly to those of the lower castes who had been exploited for centuries. But a giver-receiver relationship developed between the missions and the Christianized poor. Individual church members who asserted leadership were suppressed.

The dependency thus created has left many Christians wondering whether they are condemned to remain poor. They are afraid to take stands on issues, remaining passive. And church leadership follows patterns estab-

lished by missions: activities are determined by economic power. The Indian church remains unable to fulfill its humanitarian role, unwittingly leaving the mission of Jesus in the hands of the world when what the world needs most is a humanizing church to provide for human development.

- The action

Indian Christians must be provoked to become participants in the struggle to establish a humane culture. They must stand in the thick of the world's problems, and respond. The church needs to analyze and identify forces which contribute to oppression. Once the forces have been identified, the church must take the side of the oppressed.

- The misery

India suffers from many social and economic illnesses today: a hierarchy controls Indian life; poverty, poor nutrition and unemployment afflict many; and women, children and weaker members of society are exploited. Even though the majority of Indian Christians are poor, under-educated and spiritually weak, they need to help establish a more just society.

- Conclusion

Can a poor church participate fully in conveying the gospel message, both spiritual and material? Yes: the poor have a power within themselves which they neither recognize nor tap. They need to develop confidence, hope and courage through the gospel. Unless these poor Christians know how to spread the gospel effectively, the church's growth will be slow. Where other ideologies have failed, some eminent sociologists feel that a well-planned Christian alternative may be the answer to India's social evils.

## ***21. Dimensions of Social Responsibility in the Mission of the Church (II)***

Gabriel Mosquera Orejuela (Colombia)

- The church must decide

The church's response to its social responsibility will be determined by its answer to the questions, Who is Jesus today? Is he our model? Does he expect us to follow him? Did his actions indicate the value he placed on

men and women and on human dignity? The church must be the voice of the violated ones who have no voice, or this repression will be a whirlwind which sooner or later will explode.

The church cannot ignore today's problems, isolating itself from reality. This only sustains injustice. Our silence and indifference must be replaced by a commitment to the profound truths of the gospel, and we must administer these to all.

- The significance of Jesus and his deeds

In Jesus we see true brotherly love for the first time. Both men and women are equally worthy in Jesus' eyes. In fact, Jesus brought radical changes which eliminate distinctions based on class, social condition, political party or religious affiliation.

In him the oppressed are liberated (Luke 4:18), the sick are healed (Matt. 11:5) and conventional hierarchies are swept away (Mark 10:31). There is a new order; it is a total rescuing of the human being. The church cannot refuse to commit itself to those people to whom Christ committed himself.

- The meaning of humankind for the church

In Jesus, power is not really power unless it is at the service of the needy (Matt. 12:9-14). Long consultations and great rhetoric don't help the oppressed. To help, we must act. Since Jesus made it clear that human beings held tremendous value for him, to underestimate human value is to oppose the will of God as it is clearly expressed in the gospels.

Today's violence, hunger and injustice require a quick reply from the church. We cannot rely on a democratic system to bring justice and representative liberty, despite its claims to equality and mutual rights. In Latin America an internal colonialism has developed with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Internationally, rich countries exploit poorer countries. If the church asks for blind submission to this situation, it is turning its back on people at the moment when they most need encouragement.

- What the church means for the community

The church must demonstrate a just society to a world which faces serious social danger. This means that churches cannot support repressive

regimes where human dignity and the common good are put in danger, but churches need to take risks and present other options in leading the way to harmony among all people. The crucial element is not thinking rightly but living rightly. Indifference merely leaves the oppressed vulnerable to other ideologies which offer them help.

We need a church that, without changing its faith and practice, walks among the saddened. Only a church filled with the Holy Spirit will ask the powerful to give their goods to brothers and sisters who are dying without hope; their doing so will bring peace to all concerned, because their possessions will be at the service of all.

## ***22. Being Peacemakers in the World of Unrest (I)***

Kusangila Kitondo (Zaire)

- What is peace?

To live in peace is to live in harmony and understanding with our brothers and sisters. According to Scripture, peace is a gift of grace offered by God. Peace is Christ Jesus himself (Eph. 2:14-17). Though Jesus has suffered much more than we, he is the carrier of peace and loves all without looking for revenge. Jesus teaches us not to return evil for evil.

Peace is a permanent and constant need of the heart. Each person, family and ethnic group wants to live in peace. Unfortunately, some people's behavior causes trouble, war and division. This puts peace to the test.

- Threats to peace

In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve's family experienced a tragic event—one son killed another son. Conflict, hatred and jealousy led to death.

Enmity also threatens peace. In Zairian churches we have many problems with opposition, jealousy and lack of unity. Some brothers and sisters show their discontent by trying to gather support for their struggle for power. This deadly problem exists at the heart of the church.

Tribalism is another problem. At elections people forget Christian principles and the group divides itself according to tribe. This makes it difficult to bring back someone who has erred, since tribe members will support the erring one. It gives birth to a climate of separation. Christians find it

difficult to maintain the necessary spirit of dialogue.

- Establishing peace in the Christian community

A peacemaker is a person of love, pardon, gentleness, unity, dialogue, truth, harmony, brotherhood, and non-violence. The peacemaker's duties include sharing justice and the peace of God, and maintaining a good relationship among Christians by reading God's word daily, praying and relating to believers.

Peacemaking requires spiritual battle. We must recognize that our struggle is against rebellious spirits, and we must use biblical means to resolve the conflict. Truth, justice, faith and zeal for the gospel are weapons we will need to use.

A peacemaker must be ready to face difficulties. Mistreatment, false accusation and imprisonment may lie ahead. But there are only two methods to solve problems: Cain's method and the method of the cross. Cain's method renders evil for evil. It seeks to kill, divide, and breed hatred.

The method of the cross is a message of love and unity, but it carries a cost. This is why a Christian who wants to establish peace must suffer personally rather than causing other Christians to suffer. God's people must form a community of love; we cannot preach salvation while practicing hatred and vengeance in our churches.

As Christians, we must announce the gospel of love so that God's children will be united; teach all believers that spiritual combat is of great worth; suffer rather than cause others to suffer; avoid returning evil for evil; and forgive others, not claiming repayment. With this loving method of the cross, we can resolve conflicts and transform the world. For where there is no love, there is no peace.

## ***23. Being Peacemakers in the World of Unrest (II)***

Henry J. Schmidt (U.S.)

- Biblical perspectives on peacemaking

One of the deepest crises of our time is the crisis of violence. Poverty, oppression, the arms race, child abuse, marital conflict—violence surrounds us. In the midst of this we see Jesus' promise, "Peace I leave with you,

my peace I give to you; not as the world give I to you" (John 14:27). Through Jesus' use of the word "peace" we know that peace originates in God. It is an inner experience in the midst of tribulation (Paul uses the term "reconciliation"). And peacemaking brings righteousness and justice in our lives.

Jesus' peace restores our relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with the earth. He recognized our longing for these broken relationships to be restored.

When Jesus proclaims that his kingdom has begun, peacemakers must be aware of the implications this has for citizens of the new kingdom. First, it implies a holy war between the conquering Spirit of God and the spirit of the demonic. Second, it implies that the church is now the visible sign of God's rule. As such, it must bind the power of the demonic and engage in ethical discernment.

Recognizing the victory which Jesus has won must not lead to passiveness. It should instead lead to missional activism and proclamation of the reconciling gospel and kingdom value system. To be a peacemaker is to be a missionary to the enemy and to love him or her into the kingdom of God. Love and concern replace retaliation.

- Practical strategies for peacemaking

*Prayer* is the first weapon to use in battling the destructive forces of evil. It declares dependence on God and on the victory Christ has won.

*Peacemaking is part of discipleship*, and we must make it clear that proclaiming the gospel cannot be separated from peacemaking. Separation of faith and ethics results in a private Christian faith which embraces personal redemption but ignores Christ's lordship in ethical areas. We must make peace on every level of relationship.

*The church must unambiguously denounce war*, first by modelling alternative attitudes of reconciliation and forgiveness. Peacemaking begins at home and in the church. This denunciation is anchored in respect for the sanctity of human life and the need for a prophetic witness against all manifestations of hatred.

*Mission must be refocused from a kingdom perspective* which acknowledges the church's trans-national and trans-cultural character. While we are grateful citizens of a particular country, we are also part of a global

kingdom that holds our first loyalty. This perspective makes it impossible to isolate world evangelization from larger issues of war and injustice. People must be alive to be evangelized.

*The gospel of peace must be contextualized* in each culture. While we want to avoid extremes, the church cannot avoid being political. The church must determine from Scripture and from the national context appropriate strategies for initiating change and dealing with injustice.

*Peacemaking will make the church counter-cultural*, since the price of being a peacemaker is vulnerability, misunderstanding, rejection, or even death. Challenging present military policies, for example, will not be popular. But Christians are called to take stands for peace on national, economic, and political policy.

*Be an agent of shalom in personal relationships*. Peacemaking must become our lifestyle. It must be applied in our homes, churches, and schools. Some models have already been initiated to help in this.

Most of all, peacemaking concerns the church's renewed obedience to Jesus' teaching. We must reject violence as we carry our mission to all peoples, seeking to bring wholeness.

## ***24. The Christian and Political Involvement (I)***

Hugo Zorrilla (Colombia)

### **• The politics of Christians**

"Politics" mentioned here refers to human action in society—seeking to live together justly. We need to look at this issue within the understanding of biblical revelation. The question is not whether we should meddle in politics or not but rather what kind of political position we should take. Every Christian, every church, is involved in politics.

Every Christian activity—interpretation, preaching, prayer, singing—is carried out within a political framework. Although Jesus has been presented as apolitical, John clearly portrays him as political. In an ironic response to the question about taxes in Mark 12:13-17, Jesus actually accuses his listeners of endorsing the Roman domination.

In Rom. 13:1-7 Paul says that those in authority are servants and



functionaries of God. This has mistakenly been interpreted as an open endorsement of those in power. But when political powers become instruments of oppression, they cease to be "of God," and the Christian's obedience to them is restrained.

Christians take several positions on this issue. Some perpetuate a dualistic worldview. They separate the gospel from service, pastoral ethics from political ethics. Others opt to remain "neutral" so they don't compromise the gospel. They don't realize that this is a naive political position which permits continued aggression. Others do not separate faith from works, recognizing that the evangelical and political commitment emanates from the purpose of the kingdom of God for all persons.

- The Christians of politics

In our Anabaptist tradition there are three key elements which define our responsibility to help people live in dignity. First, Christians should not accept political parties as final and absolute. What is absolute is the justice of God. Second, when a political party defines itself as Christian, we must see this as relative. It is the kingdom of God that is absolute. Third, we cannot identify with instruments of domination or any forms of idolatry that they promote.

What does it mean when the societies we come from are often the areas where oppressive decisions, often affecting people around the world, originate—especially when many of these decisions are made because we have been passive, secure in the power and privileges which accompany those who are strongest?

It is not strange that efforts to make peace and act as reconcilers will be taken as political statements. Those who are threatened by these efforts will try to re-define what Christianity is. This manipulation is so successful that many Christian groups fall into the trap, accepting these definitions and the limitations which may accompany them.

Several dangers await those who consider political involvement. They can transform the entire Christian message into a gospel of the future, escaping the present task. Or they can convey a Christian life of evasive and pharisaical inwardness, where the soul is important but the body is not. Or Christians may try to cover up the errors of governments, claiming neutrality.

But the New Testament message does not separate itself from the political character of the prophets. Our motivation for political involvement should not be a love of power, but a love of God reflected in love for our neighbors. Whether we like it or not, we are at the service of human beings in society for the glory of God.

## ***25. The Christian and Political Involvement (II)***

John H. Redekop (Canada)

The Christian ethic should influence or transform political perspectives just as it transforms other areas of life. Today many Christians are confused about political involvement; although they see needs in the world, they do not see the larger picture.

The Bible provides fundamental principles to guide us, but it does not spell out details. Some basic observations may help the discussion. First, the supra-national church is always primary and the state secondary. Second, Christians need to promote a more enlightened public ethic, recognizing that God may call individuals to seek office.

- The state and the church

After Cain killed Abel, God established the first civil authority. He did it to restrain evil, since Cain feared for his life. Although God ordains government—and remains Lord over it—he did not make it as part of creation. It is a post-fall accommodation to human misuse of moral freedom.

The purpose of government is to restrain evil and promote peace. Perhaps unknowingly, it facilitates the ministry of the church; Christians need to help it achieve these aims as effectively as possible. Governments also exist to promote public welfare. It follows, then, that the state is not all evil but a mixture of good and evil. If good people hold political office the concerns of the church and of government may have even greater overlap.

The early church apparently did not address political issues, although individuals like Paul were not reluctant to demand their political rights. Sixteenth century Anabaptists addressed these issues extensively, sometimes dying for their involvement. In the twentieth century many Christians, including Anabaptists, have become more involved politically as

government continues to grow.

- Some considerations

God is Lord of all and we must faithfully transmit his moral directives. While we are to be model citizens, we cannot obey laws which oppose our Lord's claims. We see a peace emphasis as an intrinsic part of these claims, and therefore we cannot in good conscience hate or kill.

Since massive amounts of our earnings flow to the state, Christian stewardship takes on new meaning if we have opportunity to influence how this money is spent. Christian ethical standards for political activism remain the same as for any other area of life.

Non-participation is not an option, since it is a form of acquiescence to the decisions of others. If we want our evangelistic efforts to be credible, we cannot remain silent in the face of injustice. This is especially true in democracies, where we can become an integral part of decision-making. Governments which decide on moral issues and control assistance programs need to hear Christians speak on behalf of the downtrodden.

- Guidelines for action

Prayer for government leaders is always important. Even if we cannot support the leaders' policies, we can pray for change. We need to thank governments when they do rule wisely. When they don't, we can communicate our views and urge governments to practice integrity. When warranted, Christians may need to inform political authorities that the Christian's first allegiance is to Jesus and his kingdom.

Christians may join a political party if integrity is not compromised. They should speak on behalf of others' needs and remember their first allegiance to Christ. They point to a better way, although ultimately they acknowledge that their highest agenda is that all people become disciples of Jesus and live accordingly. Educating the church will be a major part of this involvement.

Christians should speak to governments when religious freedom is in question, when the norms of decency are violated, when governments become arbitrary, and when Christians have something significant to say. Governments need to be told that they exercise public trust and are responsible to uphold human dignity.

Congregations and conferences differ on the question of political involvement. Political activists must do their best to prevent their activism from causing division in the church.

While Christian political activity can improve society, it is no substitute for our mission to call people to salvation and discipleship. Our first allegiance is to God's kingdom, not to our earthly kingdom. In the final analysis, it is mainly as God's Christian community that we confront government. Our witness is derived from what the church is, rather than from what Christians propose or support politically.



## **Experience and Action at Curitiba 88**

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**Don Loewen (Canada)**

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Expectations were high. Over 800 Mennonite Brethren from around the world had gathered in Curitiba, Brazil to discuss their common mission in the world. It was the first meeting of its kind, and organizers hoped that a busy schedule of seminars, plenary sessions and evangelistic services would focus attention on specific mission issues and bring an increased resolve to work closely together.

After five intense, exhilarating days, most participants felt that the high expectations had been met. Plenary messages and seminar papers (reproduced here either whole or in part) played a key role in shaping the consultation. But it was the larger circle of activities and experiences which fired imaginations and expanded vision.

Prayer, face-to-face dialogue, singing and mission reports contributed to this broader picture. For many, it was the first opportunity to meet such a diverse group of Mennonite Brethren. A sense of unity developed as the group looked back on its common faith heritage and looked forward to its common task—sharing the gospel message.

The consultation also offered a forum for the broad spectrum of opinions found in the Mennonite Brethren church. Theological, ethical and social issues are not viewed uniformly around the world, yet delegates tried to listen respectfully, to discuss openly, and to love unreservedly.

### ***1. Joining hearts and minds***

Interaction among delegates from different countries was a crucial part of the consultation's success. Myths and stereotypes were dispelled, and delegates gained new respect for the integrity and faithfulness of brothers

and sisters in other countries. Lasting relationships were established. Minds joined together to find solutions to common challenges. Hearts warmed as delegates recognized a common desire to follow Christ's call—even if the call was not interpreted uniformly by all participants.

Some of the discussion took place in formal settings. After each morning's plenary session, groups met to discuss the content and implications of the presentation they had just heard. Conversations were often energetic and at times heated; a spirit of mutual respect was maintained despite differing—and sometimes opposing—points of view.

Because of the variety of perspectives voiced in the discussion, and the limited amount of time available, most participants saw the exercise as raising awareness rather than resolving issues. Many heard opinions which they had not considered before. These would have to be processed more thoroughly before any consensus could be expected.

The afternoon seminars provoked even more discussion. Their practical topics made them relevant to each group represented. But applying specific principles was a touchy issue. In a seminar on "Being Peacemakers in a World of Violence," a Brazilian student asked what counsel could be given to Brazilians who had been drafted into the Brazilian army, since alternative service was not then an option.

Some of those present argued for non-participation despite the consequences; others suggested that involvement was acceptable. For those whose national laws make provision for conscientious objection or alternative service, it was a sobering reminder that opinions which have not been tested by fire may lack credibility.

Overall, the discussions were a valuable experience. They provided practical responses to the presentations, and they offered each delegate an opportunity to contribute to the growth of others.

But the informal interaction may have been even more important to the consultation's success. Discussions which started in formal settings were continued in meal lineups, between sessions, and late into the evening. Delegates were able to explore the underlying causes for differences. Ideas which had seemed radical or misinformed became understandable when placed within a larger context of history and experience. Deeper under-

standing did not automatically resolve disagreements, but it did reveal the thought and effort which lay behind a specific position.

Delegates were also able to encourage each other in their common tasks, despite the different circumstances and challenges faced in each country. Pastors were encouraged by the experiences of pastors from neighboring countries. Lay leaders received helpful suggestions from their counterparts in other parts of the world. Specific ideas and projects were exchanged, and a new excitement was generated.

As delegates laughed and shared experiences, a deeper level of friendship developed. Ties were formed which will play a large part in linking the Mennonite Brethren church together in the future.

Another striking feature of the interaction, especially in the discussion groups, was the lengthy and cumbersome process set in motion by each question or comment. Because of the consultation's international character, four official languages were used: Portuguese, Spanish, German, and English. If a question was asked in Spanish, it was translated simultaneously by three interpreters into German, English, and Portuguese. The response was likewise translated into three languages.

The process required a major adjustment for most of those present. Rapid exchange of ideas was not possible. Translators sometimes had to search for the best words to convey the speaker's thoughts, and ideas occasionally changed their shape when filtered through the translator.

In spite of the delays, the process worked well. Its very existence was another graphic illustration of the diversity within the worldwide body of Mennonite Brethren.

It was also a subtle reminder that German and English-speakers no longer make up a majority in the Mennonite Brethren church and haven't for some time. Those who spoke only English or only German found themselves within a limited circle. The only way to converse with those outside the circle was through a translator.

Even those Latin American conferences which still hold to their German roots noticed change. Young people are increasingly more comfortable in the national language than in German. This may bring changes in the future.



## ***2. Supporting God's work in the world***

With participants from fifteen countries, the consultation provided opportunities for delegates to inform each other about God's work around the world, and to praise God together. Each national conference was given a chance to report briefly at one of the main plenary sessions.

Delegates were surprised to hear that the Zairian Mennonite Brethren Conference has more than forty-one thousand members, making it the largest Mennonite Brethren national conference. They were challenged by the steady growth and careful planning of the Japanese conference. They were encouraged and called to discipleship by the strong commitment to Anabaptist principles in Spain. News of Colombia's violence and the challenge this poses for the church resulted in a time of soul-searching.

It was a fresh picture for those delegates who were already somewhat familiar with the worldwide Mennonite Brethren church. Hearing church representatives describe their experiences brought a feeling of closeness and a sense of identification.

For those less familiar with the broad picture, the presentations were exhilarating. The discovery of a shared heritage, shared struggles, and shared triumphs fueled a strong desire to build stronger ties for the future.

Prayer became an integral part of the international focus. After each conference's presentation the group of 1200 to 1500 people divided into twos or threes to pray for several minutes. A quiet murmur filled the large hall as delegates prayed in a variety of languages, united by a common desire to see God work in a powerful way.

Prayer also set the tone for each day's events. Various language groups met separately for thirty minutes each morning to pray for specific spiritual, political and physical needs on each continent. It was an important reminder that the success of our mission is always dependent on God's working within us and within the hearts of those who will receive the message.

## ***3. Awakening a new commitment***

When the Brazilian planning committee sat down to work out the details for Curitiba 88, they created a program with two merging streams.

One stream focused on the issues and strategies needed to forge ahead in future mission efforts. The second stream created an atmosphere where some of these mission ideas could be tested practically.

To emphasize this practical element the Brazilian Mennonite Brethren conferences (German and Portuguese-speaking) promoted the gathering as Despertar 88 or Erwachen 88 (Awakening 88, in Portuguese and German respectively). Awakening 88 became a focal point for a broader mobilization plan through which the conferences hope to inspire involvement in an ambitious outreach program.

The promotion resulted in 587 Brazilian delegates registering for the consultation. Of these, more than 150 participated in a series of classes designed to help familiarize people with various evangelistic techniques. The remainder participated in the main seminar sessions.

Many admitted that they approached these evangelistic classes fearfully. They had never handed out tracts, taken surveys, or freely shared their faith in Christ. By the end of the five day period the participants had spent a significant amount of time in the surrounding neighborhood gathering responses for a religious survey and looking for witness opportunities. Sometimes they were chastized and asked to leave immediately. Sometimes they were ignored.

Still, group members had 230 chances to share their faith. Ninety people prayed a prayer of commitment, although local arrangements chairperson Jacob August Wall says, "We don't know how many will continue in the faith. We must continue to follow up these commitments and draw the people into the church."

The classes had representatives of all ages. One of the youngest, a ten-year-old boy, led several people to a faith commitment. "I want to follow God and carry out the Great Commission," he told the assembled delegates.

Practical involvement was not limited to the Brazilians who joined the faith-sharing classes. One afternoon was set aside for all consultation participants to join in a public witness—a walk through Curitiba's downtown pedestrian mall, handing out tracts and inviting people to participate in a public worship service being held in the main square.

The public witness was to fill three functions. First, it was to show

Curitiba's 1.8 million people that Christians offer hope by pointing to Christ. Second, it was to show delegates that any Christian could hand out a tract or invite people to a service. According to Jacob August Wall, as many as 90 percent had never done this. Third, the public worship service would be a visible demonstration that Curitiba offered Christian churches who care about people—a timely message for Brazil, where much of the population seeks out spiritist solutions for their problems.

Four hundred people filled ten buses, making their way toward the city center. There they separated into three groups, converging on the main square from different directions. Ten thousand tracts asking "Is there hope?" had been printed; they were gone within fifteen minutes.

And the tracts were not just accepted and then discarded. Many people stopped what they were doing and sat down to read the tract. One man read it while having his shoes shined. This alone was a surprise to many who are accustomed to seeing people accept literature only to drop it in the nearest trash can.

Perhaps a bigger surprise was the interest of the people who received the tracts. They wanted to know why the tracts were being distributed, and their attention was drawn to the large banners carried by several group members. In sequence, the banners read "Is there hope?," "Yes, there is hope," and "Christ is the only hope." Many of the Brazilian delegates were drawn into lengthy conversations by people who wanted to find out more about the hope mentioned in the brochure and on the banner.

Before the public witness began, many participants felt nervous about sharing their faith. Blondine Knelsen of Curitiba commented, "I was worried about participating—I'm not comfortable doing things like this. But I was surprised with myself. I went out and talked to people and I really enjoyed it."

The other element of the committee's evangelistic emphasis was the evening sessions. Each evening session was specially planned with an evangelistic thrust. Local church members invited their non-Christian friends. Dynamic speakers from Brazil, Paraguay, and West Germany challenged Christians to renew their commitment and awaken to a new life of following Christ through costly discipleship. Non-Christians were challenged to accept

the gospel message and share it with their friends.

Up to two thousand people attended the meetings each evening. Twice the large auditorium could not hold all who came; some had to watch via closed circuit television in the nearby church sanctuary.

Did participants awaken? The answer cannot be found just by looking at the statistics of conversions or renewed commitments made during the five days of the consultation. The answer will be revealed slowly, over a course of years. Awakening does not happen all at once, although specific events like Curitiba 88 can help spur renewed interest and effort. A new excitement spread through the Brazilians who had a chance to share their faith. They recognized the possibilities for future involvement and pledged to work to bring the message of Awakening 88 to their home churches as well.

#### ***4. Bringing a family together***

Face to face interaction among delegates brought to light many common interests and emphases, but it also revealed some sensitive areas not always addressed in a brief consultation. Some worship styles raised objections and eyebrows; socio-economic disparities received attention; and the significance of the Holy Spirit surfaced as an ongoing discussion topic.

The debate over worship style was symbolized by two distinct types of music, both of which were used during the consultation. One group of participants preferred to sing hymns; another group preferred contemporary choruses, which they felt provided a more expressive worship experience.

The issue was not resolved during the days of the consultation. Instead, organizers tried to provide a mix which most people could enjoy. Rousing choruses were interspersed with well-sung German hymns from the choir. Group singing took place in four languages; each participant used the language he or she felt most comfortable in.

The debate over worship styles unearthed a more fundamental question concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The two sides of the issue were summed up in two questions: If the more charismatic worship styles are allowed to flourish, will the church lose its faith mooring in emotionalism? On the other hand, do we dare limit the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst, even when this expresses itself in unfamiliar ways?

Some of the ways in which the issue was debated were unfortunate. Some seminar discussions were pushed off course when participants used the occasion as a platform to air views on the necessity of freedom in the Spirit. Other participants warned against the potential dangers of an unhealthy emphasis on the Holy Spirit's ministry and power.

These differences should lead each conference and congregation to examine its role in providing further teaching and leadership on the role and meaning of the Holy Spirit's ministry in our time. The Holy Spirit, sent to bring unity, wisdom and power so the church could fulfill its mandate, should not become a source of division. Churches will need to pray and work together to avoid division.

The socio-economic diversity within the Mennonite Brethren church family was also evident. Some delegates represented countries where the average annual income is hardly enough to remain alive. Others came from wealthy countries where the normal standard of living is higher than that of all but the wealthiest citizens in Third World countries.

There were delegates representing countries where skyrocketing annual inflation rates make financial planning seem impossible. Other delegates came from countries torn by internal violence, sparked either by guerilla movements or by well-organized crime rings.

Several of the seminar papers touched on these injustices and disparities. They examined ways in which Christians could respond through political, social or economic development channels, or by expressing a witness of peace in a practical way.

The discussion also hit closer to home. Difficult questions were raised as international representatives gathered to plan future steps in internationalizing our common mission effort. How would a country with few financial resources but significant personnel resources fit into the plan? Would financial control remain in the hands of those who were able to contribute the largest amounts of money?

The questions were asked and received in a spirit of love, but the issues were real. Charting an international partnership raises issues which need to be handled sensitively. Each national conference must participate out of its willingness to join in mission, rather than on the basis of the resources

at its disposal.

At the same time, as one author pointed out in a seminar paper, no one is excused from his or her responsibility to share the gospel and to improve society on the basis of inadequate resources. Whether rich or poor, each person has abilities and gifts which can be used in building up the kingdom of God and loving his or her neighbor.

## ***Conclusion***

Curitiba 88 was an historic event. For the first time Mennonite Brethren from around the world were able to sit side by side, discovering commonalities and differences. The consultation revealed unity on central points of faith. The consultation also revealed diversity in how we understand theological issues and in how these understandings shape our activities. The wide variety of cultures and languages revealed this diversity in a more external way.

We need to capitalize on this diversity, using the different approaches where they will be most effective in extending the kingdom of God. We want to grow by learning from these ideas in our respective conferences. We want to improve our effectiveness by working together both regionally and globally, by using our wide range of experience to strengthen our witness. Will this vision be picked up and carried forward?

Mennonite Brethren are committed to world mission. That is the resounding message of Curitiba 88. We want to work hard together, building deeper relationships and accepting each contribution to the global task. We want to respect each other as those who make up different parts of one body under the headship of Christ our Lord. We want to grow closer together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And we want all our efforts to bring praise and glory to God, the creator and sustainer of all.

*Don Loewen is an Associate Secretary with Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services in Winnipeg, MB.*



# IMPULSE FOR THE FUTURE

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Victor Adrian

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Today Christianity has become a global faith. In virtually every country in the world, there are some people who have heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. This tremendous fact should encourage our hearts and inspire us to new efforts in world evangelization. We are experiencing in our age as never before, the promise of our Lord when he predicted, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (John 12:32). But while millions have heard and believe, millions have not yet heard and therefore cannot believe and be saved (Rom. 10).

## ***1. Mission—at the Heart of the Mennonite Brethren Church***

Curitiba 88, with its theme of the mission of the church in the world, was at the center of the Mennonite Brethren historical tradition. The Mennonite Brethren church has from its beginning in 1860 focused on the need for an experiential, life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ and a commitment to proclaim him to the world. From the beginning, the Mennonite Brethren were rooted in two renewal movements which shaped their character and life—Anabaptism of the sixteenth century and the Pietistic movement. Both of these movements sought to restore the New Testament nature of the church and its mission in the world.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptism, as illustrated by Menno Simons, took seriously both the Great Commission and the power of the resurrection, spreading the gospel throughout Europe in spite of heavy persecution. Anabaptists were deeply conscious of the call to commitment and to the restoration of New Testament Christianity in their day and times. The sense of being part of God's movement in the world motivated them to a radical fol-



lowing of Jesus

Christ. Franklin Littell, an Anabaptist scholar, points out that no words of Jesus were given more serious attention by the Anabaptists than his final commission, "Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19,20) (Wilbert R. Shenk, (ed.), *Anabaptism in Mission*, Herald Press, 18).

If the Anabaptist mission impulse was suppressed by persecution in some countries and by the subsequent prosperity in others, we today live in times of freedom and of opportunity to fan into bright flame the contemporary impulse to mission.

The Pietistic movement which penetrated the southern Ukraine and contributed substantially towards the renewal movement that created the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860 also inspired new mission impulses. The teaching of Spener (the founder), the efforts of Franke, and the renewal school of Halle in Prussia soon spread a new zeal for renewed life in the church, for evangelization and mission. These emphases flowed into the newly-created Mennonite Brethren church, impelling it to evangelization in Russia and ultimately among the unevangelized in other parts of the world. The Mennonite Brethren church participated in what Richard Lovelace calls the "Evangelical Stream of Church Renewal" (Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, InterVarsity, 321).

As we approach the second millenium the question is, Will the Mennonite Brethren church, existing in about seventeen countries of the world and on five continents, capture afresh Christ's vision for the world?

The Curitiba 88 consultation, focusing on the Mennonite Brethren mission in the world, could be a step in that direction. We have asked several Mennonite Brethren church leaders who attended the conference to express some of their responses to the perspectives and issues raised at the conference. Much remains to be done in creating forums for international discussion of theological, missiological and ethical issues. Much remains to be experienced in terms of the refreshing streams of the Holy Spirit. Much remains to be done in terms of renewed commitment to Christ our Lord!

## **2. Church Leaders' Responses**

The Curitiba '88 consultation inspired a broad range of responses, but almost all who attended felt the consultation was an important step toward future partnership. A general approval of the mission theme was evident. The international character of the Mennonite Brethren family was much appreciated.

### **Kusangila Kitondo, Zaire**

This gathering of the Mennonite Brethren family was a great experience; it gave us an opportunity to hear what God is doing in other parts of the world, and it was a significant help in furthering a common understanding of our mission. Despite differences, the foundation is still the same. The consultation demonstrated the true sense of unity in diversity.

Those gathered in Curitiba also indicated a desire to work together in greater unity, although this will need to be supported by a more concrete structure which addresses the practical issues. Maintaining a close relationship as a denomination is basic to the success of this mutual mission effort. This relationship must be tied to love and to open dialogue.

Internationalizing our mission is a very important subject for the present and for the future. We must set up committees which can work out some specific ways to apply principles of internationalization to our work.

### **Takao Nakamura, Japan**

I felt very good about the Curitiba Mennonite Brethren consultation for three reasons. First, it gave me a good understanding of our foreign mission program and our foreign mission policies. I noted particularly the following three aspects: a) There is a movement toward indigenization; b) there is an encouragement of the exercise of local autonomy; c) there is an emphasis upon the development of leadership. The Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services program nurtures all these three aspects in their foreign mission policies. There is evident a growing and maturing of the Mennonite Brethren churches in the various countries, and I enjoyed the fellowship with the representatives of the various national churches.

Second, I learned much from the conference. I was deeply impressed with the zeal for evangelism in many of the countries. It was particularly evident that the Brazilian conferences are actively planning renewal and evangelization in Brazil. Then, too, I felt very close to the various Mennonite Brethren churches, even though our cultures differed. Our goals were all very similar. I want to make a comment finally that the North American Mennonite Brethren have left our national churches a good inheritance with respect to evangelism and church planting.

Third, there was also a sense of working together evident at the Curitiba conference. The sessions in which Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services met with the various conference representatives on internationalization and cooperation were very encouraging to me and met with a good response on the part of the participants. The discussions indicated that a new era of world evangelization lies before us. The discussions of the conference representatives among themselves also indicated that a new era of Mennonite Brethren international fellowship is before us.

### **Hans Pankratz, Paraguay**

Taking part in this consultation has enriched my life. Although we as a church family have many differences of opinion—in fact, sometimes we contradict each other—this isn't a cause for alarm yet. We need to examine ourselves, remaining firm on the essentials of our faith while allowing flexibility in other areas. The authority of the Bible, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the recognition of our biblical inheritance will guide us to unity.

The consultation didn't just show what the Mennonite Brethren church has done but also how much more still needs to be done. The Great Commission belongs to all of us—we have to find the right way to internationalize our efforts in this common task, without neglecting the nurture of the local church. Mission is the result of healthy churches.

In the future, mutual exchange of information and workers, production and translation of helpful literature, and occasional faith conferences will help us build a many-sided but united worldwide brotherhood.

### **Ruth Villar, Paraguay**

This consultation gave me a better understanding of my own role in ministry; it also helped me meet others who are also involved in the church. As a church, gatherings like this help us understand our mission better, and they point to our need for greater diligence.

I think our work will be improved as a result of Curitiba '88. We will have a clearer identity as Mennonite Brethren in Paraguayan society, and we will be able to improve our international work together. We need to keep working to maintain a close relationship in the future.

### **Franz Rathmair, Austria**

This was a significant event. For the first time, Mennonite Brethren from around the world came together to look at our common mission. In the process we discovered both our points of agreement and our points of disagreement. In the future I envision closer ties between national conferences on several levels, not just on the level of mission personnel and structures.

The focus, in my opinion, should increasingly be, What can we learn from each other for our own situation? How can we receive inspiration from our worldwide church family? We will have to find ways of communicating these insights to the grassroots level in our conferences. At the same time we need to be good stewards of our resources, not sponsoring too many international meetings.

As Mennonite Brethren, we need all the help we can give and receive from one another, on both the local and international levels. Curitiba 88 was a step in the right direction.

### **Paul Hiebert, U.S.**

One of the most important things at the consultation was the informal contact between sessions. It helped set up networks, friendships, and relationships that will provide bridges in the future. In a number of instances I sensed much openness to a community hermeneutic—an agreement that we must go to the Scriptures for answers and that we must do it together, not alone.

Being made aware of the international nature of the Mennonite Brethren church is very valuable. Recognizing that for language reasons I cannot talk to all my Mennonite Brethren brothers and sisters is an important realization. I think this will help us de-Westernize the church. When people from other countries see us model internationalism, it diffuses the feeling that we are importing a foreign gospel.

### **Alfred and Beatrice Foth, Uruguay**

This gathering was very edifying for us. It was an important reminder of who we are as a Mennonite Brethren church, and it also provided a vivid picture of God's work around the world. Hearing and seeing these reports firsthand is very different from reading them. When people describe their experiences in person we can see the expressions on their faces, their emotions, and their gestures. There is no doubt that a gathering like this helps us understand each other better and helps us maintain our vision for evangelism.

We are partners together in the task of gaining the world for Christ. Developing closer relationships will help us to work harder at this in the future. The motto "*Despertar 88*" (Awakening 88) chosen by the Brazilian committee was very appropriate. We need to awaken the sleepy ones in our midst to work hard at this task until Christ returns. Consultations like this could be held regularly.

### **Herbert Brandt, Canada**

The Curitiba 88 consultation is more significant for the questions that were asked of each other internationally than for the answers that were suggested. The questions of polity, morality, theology, missiology and other issues helped me to realize the diversity that exists among Mennonite Brethren.

This gathering also gave me new hope because for the first time I experienced an event where North American paternalism was not predominantly displayed.

To me it became more obvious that the mission of the church can

be seen as an international responsibility. Equality in partnership can become a reality. Internationalization of Mennonite Brethren national conferences is feasible. Only as that happens will it be possible to achieve the close relationship that Mennonite Brethren worldwide desire.

This consultation gave fairly clear indication that new avenues of communication among national conferences will need to be found. The future strength of international partnership will likely lie outside the North American agency of Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services. The awareness that we need each other goes deeper than the need to work together.

### **Shindany Fumu, Zaire**

The Curitiba 88 gathering was an important occasion for give and take. It helped us share our Christian experience while placing new trail markers for the last frontier: reaching unreached people with the gospel.

I give praise to God who inspired this gathering, and I give thanks to those who helped us in Zaire to take part. The practical themes developed were very interesting; discussions were open, but time was extremely short as we tried to get to the bottom of the issues. Nevertheless, a number of doctrinal problems were brought to light. Discussions were enriching and edifying. Local organization was excellent.

The objectives of the meeting were largely met; participants coming from unlike political, socio-cultural milieux were united in the same spirit and permeated with love. These bonds were tightened as we learned more about each other.

The theme of internationalization grips my heart. The presentations by Harold Ens and Nzash Lumeya were a revelation of a new vision for mission and of the relationship between Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services and the young churches of the Third World.

I think of the situation as similar to the circulation of blood in the body. There is the small and the large circulation. Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services has been doing the small circulation when looked at in terms of a global body. We rightly praise these efforts.

Now, all the churches will arrange themselves in the circle, involving themselves in the action as soon as they are operational. May it no longer

be the work of the North American mission society, but rather the concern of all: India, Zaire, Japan, Brazil, and all other countries. I hope that each church will burn with a desire to participate in the mission whereby the Mennonite Brethren church participates in reaching the world with the gospel.

### **Vera Regina Janzen, Brazil**

I felt a real spirit of unity at the consultation. There was a coming together of people from all countries, gathering around a central theme. It gave a better vision of the world and of our part in the church's mission. The speakers knew the Bible well, preached well, and have given us much to think about.

### **Gabriel Mosquera Orejuela, Colombia**

Participants came to Curitiba 88 to join in fraternal dialogue about the things they heard and saw. Time was short, and many questions were left unasked and unanswered in the discussion periods. Instead, the questions were raised later, as many delegates stayed up late into the night to continue the debate in a brotherly way.

The consultation did not have rigid outlines. Participants from different countries reflected the range of approaches within our diverse group. And God guided the course of events, bringing spiritual and mental renewal to missionaries, pastors, evangelists, and teachers. Their desire to be more effective in ministry was contagious, in the best sense of the term.

Mennonites around the world are experiencing the profound moving of the Holy Spirit. They experience this within a faith which remains firm in the past but examines issues of the present within a biblical and christocentric framework. Our vision will be enlarged to the degree in which the Holy Spirit is able to move in men and women who desire his presence.

Curitiba 88 was a stage in the pilgrimage of our church. It was a reminder that faith as well as practice must be significant for us each day. It was a chance to present the concerns which have been stored up in the hearts of our brothers and sisters. We have to treat these seriously. Old structures may need to be set aside as we shape our lives to fit the gospel's call to the

integrity and wholeness of each human being.

### **Marlene Enns, Paraguay**

The consultation was an opportunity to become more familiar with people or countries for which I've prayed in the past and to renew friendships. Seminars and other interaction revealed the wide diversity in our worldwide church; time factors didn't allow us to come to a consensus on the issues which surfaced. I believe this process can help move us toward partnership, but we have a long way to go.

Human factors in mission and church growth received heavy emphasis; perhaps the divine and supernatural factors could have received more emphasis. In Third World countries people are confronted with a real spirit world and need a theology of power. The organization at the consultation was excellent.

### ***3. Perspectives of Hope***

Although we, together with evangelical churches, may at times feel the task of evangelizing the world is overwhelming, Christ gives us perspectives which enable us to face the future with hope and expectation.

We need, in the first place, to be permeated in our thinking and planning with clear New Testament theological perspectives. Central to our theology of mission must be the recognition that the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ has profoundly altered the world situation. God has acted in Christ, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5). Christ has come to save the world, not to condemn it (John 3:17).

God has in Christ expressed with overflowing love and mercy his desire to have all mankind come to know him. He is detaining the second coming of Christ because he desires that all come to repentance, not wanting that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). The promise given to Abraham, that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed, is coming to fulfillment. But it is not yet completed!

Christ has made abundantly clear that outside of him there is no sal-



vation, that he is the way, the truth and the life—the only way to the Father (John 14:6). We cannot be lost in the confusion of voices suggesting that there are other ways to the Father. The cross of Christ alone opens the way to God. Through the shedding of his blood, those who were far off have been brought near to him (Eph. 2).

We need to be clearly committed to the continuing validity of the biblical mandate to disciple all the nations (Matt. 28; Acts 1). As long as there are unevangelized peoples, whether in home countries or in countries beyond, we cannot rest until we have fulfilled our Lord's bidding. Surely, the call to discipleship incorporates the church's mission in the world: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men; if any man would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

We also need to have faith in the present lordship of Jesus Christ on the right hand of God. We must exercise faith in a supreme power to build the church against all odds. We must have faith in the supremacy of his kingdom in the world. We live in an eschatological age and we are engaged in an eschatological task as we bring the gospel to the nations.

Secondly, we as Mennonite Brethren need to take time to talk to and listen to each other. In a denominational relationship it is important that we have forums of discussion and exchange. Some of our cultural differences affect our perspectives. Therefore, cross-cultural theological, biblical, as well as missiological discussions are important. We need to learn from one another; we need to grow in unity with one another. We strengthen our witness as we contribute our gifts and insights to each other (Eph. 4).

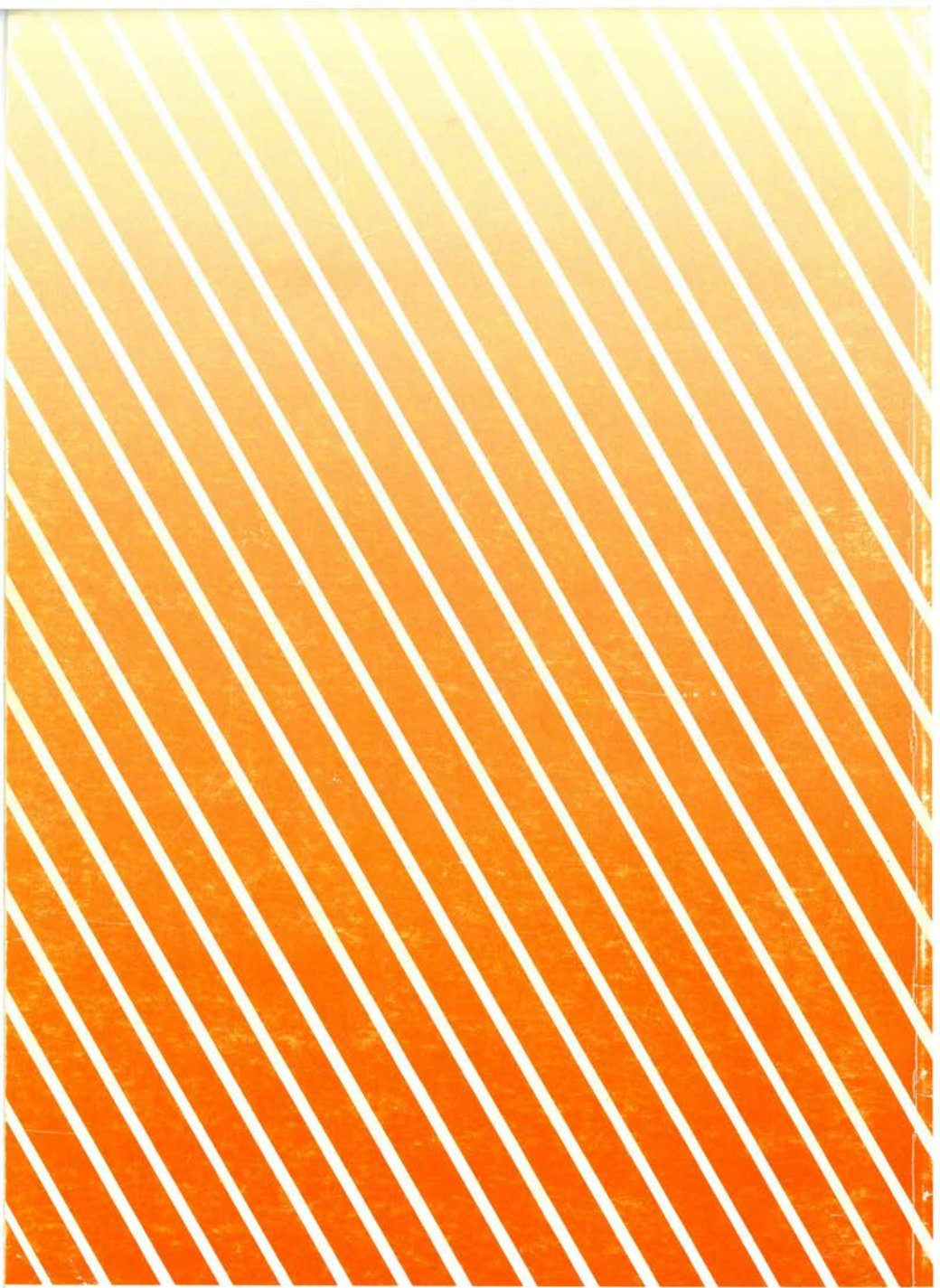
It is understandable that differing perspectives will emerge. How we experience life—its free or oppressive character, its social and economic challenges, its educational philosophies—tends to shape styles of spirituality and expressions of theology. What is therefore fundamental to an ongoing discussion is a firm commitment to Scripture and an openness to the illumination of it in our contemporary world by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, international discussions must continue so that we may encourage each other in biblical perspectives, in Christian life, and in mission. The enrichment of international fellowship is our privilege and our responsibility!

In addition to international discussions there needs to be freedom to theologize in our own cultural settings as we seek to be faithful to the Scriptures. As we face the future, we will learn how to keep in healthy tension and complimentation our respective insights into the Scriptures and the leading of the Lord in mission.

Thirdly, we must find ways of cooperating in our mutual mission in the world. As we move from international mission teams to international cooperation in decision-making in planning, and executing mission, we need to seek the wisdom of our Lord. Practicalities and efficient stewardship of our resources remain important considerations. International gatherings are never an end in themselves—they are but ways and means towards a growing fellowship and a more effective partnership in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.





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